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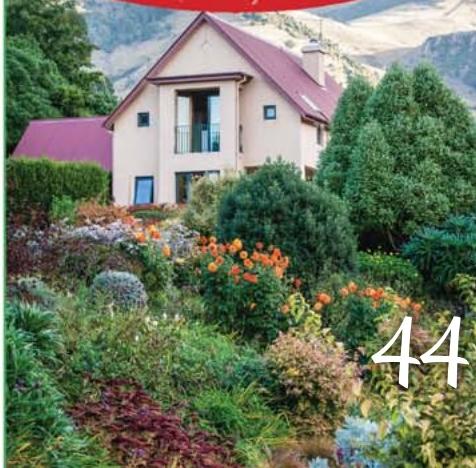


56



26

DECEMBER



44



Grow your own

12 Vege patch to-do list

This month's moon calendar plus edible crops to sow and plant now

16 2014 Tui Gardener of the Year

Meet this year's inspiring winner

19 Vege masters

Five expert vege growers share their secrets for bumper crops

26 Summer fruit tree care

Summer jobs in the orchard, plus tips on harvesting fruit and planting a new tree

29 Sweet as stevia

Grow your own stevia for guiltless, sugar-free baking and preserves

32 Seasonal Preserve

Brew dandelion wine

33 Summer sips

Refreshing cocktails from the garden

36 Ruud Kleinpaste

Earwigs – gardeners' friend or foe?

38 DIY compost bin

Build a trellis bin with a sliding front panel

40 Ask our experts

We answer your fruit and vege questions

People & plants

44 Saying goodbye

Watercolourist Nancy Tichborne farewells her inspiring garden at French Farm Bay

52 Mini estate

A suburban Auckland garden replicates traditional English style in miniature

56 25 days of Christmas

Lynda Hallinan's Christmas countdown, plus her top and flop crops this month

64 In Season

Neil Ross' favourite golden oldie perennials

68 Xanthe White talks plants

Xanthe talks romance and reproduction with one of our native mistletoes

70 DIY Florist

Deck the halls with a sweet summer wreath



86

new zealand gardener

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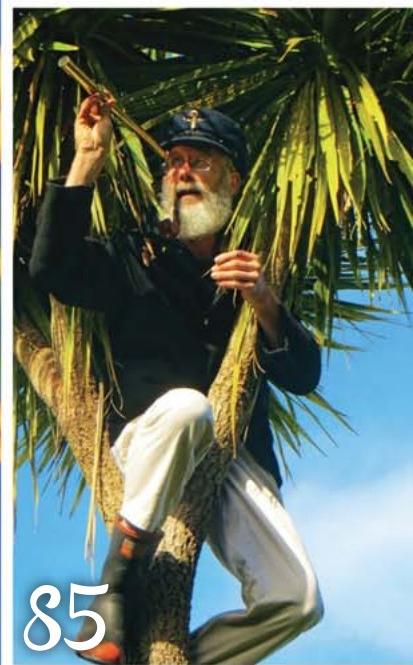
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78



85

Regional advice

72 Northland

Russell Fransham tames bougainvilleas

74 Auckland

Jo McCarroll outsmarts the birds on her quest for a bounty of berries this summer

75 Waikato

Sheryn Clothier has scoured the countryside for the best free mulch

76 Hawke's Bay

Janet Luke goes with the "flow" when collecting her bees' surplus honey

77 Taranaki

Abbie Jury banks on raspberries and peas for Christmas and talks untraditional trees

78 Kapiti

Julian Matthews discusses tui tucker, including the orange marmalade bush

80 Nelson

Heather Cole grows berries for the pav

82 Akaroa

Barbara Lea-Taylor's favourite red roses for Christmas, plus summer rose care

84 Dunedin

Margaret Barker enjoys the seasonal ballet of her garden and plants an echeveria pie

85 Southland

Robert Guyton clammers up the trunk of a cabbage tree to observe his tidal garden

Gardener's road trip

86 20 great things to do in Akaroa

Jo McCarroll and Barbara Lea-Taylor visit Akaroa's top horticultural spots

Every month

7 Editorial

8 Mailbox

Your letters

92 Gardening Odds & Sods

New plants; your questions answered

96 Junior gardeners

Make Christmas crackers for gardeners; Whangarei Blind Foundation garden

99 Christmas gift guide

107 Books and giveaway

108 Events and giveaways

109 Small Acorns

114 Man's World

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Competitions

105 Win Christmas goodies worth \$1500

107 Win Emma Bass' book *Imperfect*

108 Win Tui products and a garden calendar

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"If you don't like bacteria, you're on the wrong planet."

Craig Venter

I was leafing through a newspaper the other day and I happened to see an interview with Dr Heather Hendrickson, a senior lecturer in molecular bioscience at Massey University. Heather is an expert in the evolution of bacteria, so she was talking about various interesting things and mentioned that there is a bacteria living in soil called *Mycobacterium vaccae*, commonly referred to as *M. vaccae*. When you come into contact with this bacterium the serotonin levels in your brain go up, she said, so effectively working with soil improves your mood. "Why do people garden?" Heather asked. "Because it really does make you happy."

Now there are two words that I often find myself thinking we do not say to scientists enough and they are: well, duh. As gardeners, we already know of course that a day spent with your hands in the soil induces a real sense of happiness and well-being, but I was pleased to hear that the scientific community is finally up to speed on this and I called Heather and asked her to tell me more about the science behind it.

She told me there are thousands of bacteria in soil – there have been estimates of anything from between 2000 and 830,000 different species of microbes in every gram of dirt. *M. vaccae* is just one of those bacteria. It's closely related to *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, which is the causative agent of tuberculosis, and the scientists wanted to find out if it could be used therapeutically, so they gave it to patients suffering from lung cancer. And the patients reported that not only had their symptoms eased, they felt a lot happier about everything too.

At that point, Heather told me, these scientists started to wonder if this particular bacterium has the ability to improve people's moods. To find out, they did some tests on mice, and mice exposed to *M. vaccae*, Heather says, were less stressed than mice that weren't. (Now I'm sure you, like me, immediately want to know how they measure stress responses in mice. Heather says they put the mice in tiny mouse-sized swimming pools and see how long they'll swim for – a stressed mouse will give up quite quickly.)

Eventually they managed to figure out that being exposed to this soil-dwelling bacteria stimulated a certain set of neurones in the mice's brains; which contributed to serotonin production. They also discovered that the mice were significantly better at solving mazes, even a couple of weeks after being exposed to these happy-inducing soil-dwelling microbes.

And finally, Heather told me, another study has found that children who are exposed to lots of different soil bacteria and fungi are less likely to suffer from asthma than children who aren't around soil as much.

I am no scientist, but even I can see what the data is suggesting: gardeners are happier, less stressed, smarter and healthier than other people. Once again, can I just say: well done science, but we knew that already.

Scientists are now wondering, Heather says, about the impact these bacteria would have on humans if they were made into some kind of topical cream or smoothie-type product. I said that a scientist should do some work to find out if chugging back a happy-bac-smoothie is more or less effective in terms of improving your mood compared to spending a couple of hours in the garden. Heather says there's currently no funding for this research, but it would be a perfectly legitimate line of scientific enquiry and she's more than happy to do it herself if I can arrange the money side, so I may well be looking at crowd funding this investigation sometime soon. Although I think we, as gardeners, already know what the result will be.

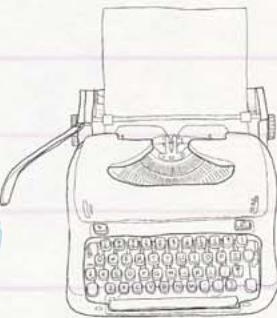
Finally, the whole team at *NZ Gardener* wishes you a happy Christmas and an enjoyable and safe new year. Have a great December... and here's to a wonderful 2015 in the garden!

Jo McCarroll



Jo

Mailbox



I THINK I AM A BIT WILD AT HEART

And apparently my wild flower seeds are also rebellious! I planted them in a bare strip of land a few months ago, with the vision of thick masses of pretty buds growing with abandon. When I saw a few shoots coming up I got excited, but I turned my back on the garden for a few weeks (I hurt my foot!) and lo and behold my low meadow of wildflowers promptly grew into thick mass of weeds.

Now I know wild flowers are effectively weeds – but I wanted pretty, flowering weeds, not the sort I already had! I sprayed the area off with weedkiller before planting the seeds, but the patch has been a haven for garden invaders for many years. I've planted more wild flowers and this time I want to pull out the (ugly) weeds before they get bigger – but right now I'm unable to tell the weeds and the wild flowers apart!

Emma Rawson, AUCKLAND

WE TRAPPED MORE THAN BUGS

We hung sticky, yellow traps in the garden to catch bugs. You can imagine my horror and distress when, walking in the garden a short while later, I spied a small wax-eye struggling to release itself from the sticky, yellow trap. With help the wee bird found freedom, but I threw the traps away. I would much rather have the chatter of the birds flitting around the garden.

Margaret Howley, CHRISTCHURCH

HERE'S A CARROT-SOWING TIP

In the latest issue you suggested mixing carrot seed with radish seed or sand to space the plants out. I rip open used teabags and thoroughly dry out the tea leaves to mix with the carrot seed. A bonus is the colour of the tea leaves is markedly different to the soil colour, so I can see where I have covered the ground.

Lyn O'Connor, AUCKLAND

I DONT SEE HOLLY OAKS BY THE SEA

I would expect to see *Quercus ilex* growing in coastal situations in New Zealand. I have seen it mentioned in a lot of gardening books that they do well beside the seaside: *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles* says they "thrive well near the sea"; *The Hillier Manual of Trees and Shrubs* describes the plant as "particularly valuable for coastal planting, resistant to sea winds"; in *Botanica* it says they "grow well on the coast"; in *The International Book of Trees* Hugh Johnson says they "grow well in shade and other difficult conditions and near the sea"; and Robert Harrison's *Handbook of Trees and Shrubs for the Southern Hemisphere* says they "withstand heavy winds and even salt spray". But I have never seen one growing on the coast here! Does anyone know of any in a coastal situation?

Alan C. Meyer, WAIMATE

We asked dendrologists all over the country! The trees are definitely available here – Lloyd Houghten from Wairere Nursery has holly oaks (aka holm oaks) for sale and has seen one specimen growing at Waihi Beach. Eric Appleton from wholesale growers Appletons Tree Nursery hasn't seen them growing beside the sea in New Zealand but knows of plantings for coastal shelter at Holkham Estate in East Anglia, UK, where the conditions in winter are very bleak when cold easterly winds blow from Siberia. He doubts that anywhere in Southland would match those conditions! Margaret Barker has grown a holm oak at Larnach Castle. "We have had it growing in the teeth of the cold wind that comes down the Otago Harbour – the north-easterly, not the southerly. It would get the occasional dose of salt spray." Do any readers know of other examples where holly oaks are growing by the coast? Barbara Smith

LAST YEAR I WAS A LUCKY WINNER.

In your annual Gardener of the Year competition, I took out the Best Gardening Grandparent title. What a grand time I have had over the year since then! My prizes included gumboots, seeds, bulbs, fertilisers and edible fruit trees. My grandchildren were especially excited – all four were able to choose their favourite colour of tulip and plant them, and they are flowering now in pots on decks in Cambridge and at Linton Military Camp! Growing cauliflowers and broccoli from seed sent to me by Kings Seeds has been great fun too!

I celebrated my 70th birthday this year, just like your lovely magazine. As a little tot at the end of the war, I was oblivious to the catastrophe that had taken place, but I do remember holding on to my dad's khaki shorts and leaning on his gumboots when he watered our vegetable garden.

He was a practical, no-nonsense gardener, growing carrots, broad beans, peas and 'Ilam Hardy' potatoes. I still grow 'Ilam Hardy' spuds today and so does my granddaughter Annabelle.

Local saleyards were an ideal place to pick up manure for the garden after the weekday sales. Dad would head off there before teatime. I went along for a ride in the cart, but always had to walk home because it was too smelly! He put the manure in barrels and stirred in rainwater. Gosh it made veges grow. I guess my dad did "dig for victory" in his own backyard and we all reaped the harvest.

I know I am passing on my gardening skills to my grandchildren, the skills that I learnt at my father's knee – or should I say his gumboots and khaki shorts! A very happy birthday to *NZ Gardener* and to all the other babies that were born in 1944! Shirley Stephens, INGLEWOOD



WHAT'S THIS BOX AT THE DOOR?

I wasn't expecting a parcel and had already celebrated my 75th earlier in October. Once removed from the packing, I saw it was a beautiful, healthy Bob Matthews Floribunda rose, 'NZ Gardener', the one Bob bred to celebrate the 70th birthday of *NZ Gardener*. I had won one as a subscriber! I am in the process of reorganising my garden and have a spot which needed, well, something. Hey presto, the "something" had been delivered right to the front door! Doreen McLeod, WAIHI

WHAT HAS MY WIFE ORDERED?

That's what I wondered, when I found the tall box on the doorstep. Then I discovered it was addressed to me – a 'NZ Gardener' rose I had won as a subscriber. I have already put in five new roses this year, but will definitely find room for another one. Richard Whitley, MASTERTON

THANKS FOR THE ROSE YOU SENT!

'NZ Gardener' is stunning and we can't wait to see it flower. What makes it more special is that it arrived on our 27th wedding anniversary.

Sue and Linus Hinton, NEW PLYMOUTH

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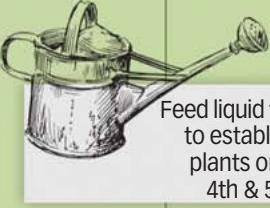
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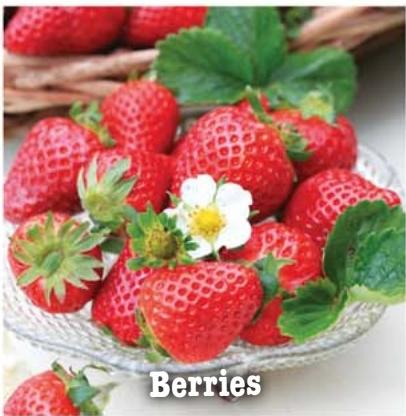
WHAT TO SOW & PLANT

Gardening by the moon

Robert Guyton's guide to planting and sowing in harmony with the lunar cycle

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
	2 Opportunity strikes in this first-quarter period. Sow French beans, lettuce and peas. Wait until later in the month to plant root crops.	3	4  Feed liquid fertiliser to established plants on the 4th & 5th.	5	6	7  Full Moon 1:27am
8	9		10 Sow root crops, such as carrots and turnips, on the 10th and 11th.	11	12 During this barren phase, vitality is low – you may be in need of a rest too.	13 
15  Last Quarter	16	17 From midday on the 17th to midday on the 19th is another opportunity to sow root crops such as carrots, radishes and turnips.	18	19	20 Cultivate soil, if you must, from the 20th to the 24th.	21
22  New Moon 2:36pm	23	24		25 From the 25th to the 31st is a time of high energy in the garden. Sow lots of anything that will grow to maturity by summer's end.	26	27
29  First Quarter	30	31		<h1>December</h1>		COLOUR CODING KEY Sow and plant Cultivate only Barren period Sow root crops

THIS MONTH...



- **Take steps now for festive berries.**

Having lost most of my strawberry crop to birds in previous years, I'm looking forward to my best ever strawberry harvest this summer – I've written about my new maximum-security bird netting in my regional column on page 74. But now the birds aren't eating all my berries, plenty of other pests are appearing on the scene to do so! I spotted quite a few ripe fruit had holes in them and I blame slugs. The pea straw mulch I use might look nice, but it also makes a great hiding place for those slimy blighters! I've been going out at night on squashing missions (I don't like to lay bait because of my cat, Dusty Springfield). I've spotted slaters around too, but remember they will only target overripe, decaying fruit and won't actually eat any of the fruit you want to pick. Ripe strawberries don't last well on the plant, so try and pick what's ready every day.

• **Sow corn.** Don't waste your time trying to get corn off to an early start – it likes it warm and will sulk if put in the ground too soon. Sow it now (in blocks, rather than rows, to aid pollination, otherwise you can end up with gappy cobs). Keep the water up and keep weeds around your plants down too. Corn needs a good supply of water to produce plump sweet cobs. Most corn needs a long hot summer to do well. In cooler places with shorter summers, go for a fast-maturing variety (just look for one with "early" in its name).



• **Don't forget your toms!** I know, I say it every year but pinch off the laterals. Your plant wants to be a bush, but it will bear more fruit if you encourage it to be a vine – plus the better air circulation helps prevent some of the diseases toms are prone to. If you tend to your laterals every three or four days, it's a good way to spot the first signs of diseases or pests – early action is always the most effective. Keep tying the plants into the stakes as they grow. The stems are relatively puny when you think of the weight of a truss of toms, and can break in high winds. Check that your peppers and eggplants are tied firmly to their stakes (but not being strangled) at the same time. Give these plants a weekly dose of liquid tomato food once the first fruit has started to form.



• **Harvest new potatoes for the 25th.** I'll have 'Rocket', 'Swift' and 'Jersey Bennes' ready for Christmas, although truth be told, I only planted 'Rocket' and 'Swift'... the 'Jersey Bennes' are self sown from last year's plants! That's not good practice – leaving potatoes in the ground gives all sorts of pests and diseases a chance to overwinter – but I am not berating myself

too much, since it resulted in me having new potatoes ready months ago.

With new potatoes, wait until the plants have flowered to dig your crop up. This shows you that the tubers are fully formed. With your main-crop spuds, wait until the plants start to die back. Don't overwater your main-crop potatoes – excessive watering means they don't keep as well.

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WHAT TO SOW & PLANT THIS



• **Go on pest watch.** White cabbage butterfly caterpillars, aphids, slugs, snails and green vege beetles are all active now. Prevention is the best defence. Getting out and squashing aphids by hand does keep the population in check if you do it every day, as does picking off and stepping on slugs and snails – it's best to do this at night when these gastropods are active, so if you don't already have one, ask Santa for a head torch! White cabbage butterflies are harder to catch (although I've heard attempting to catch them in a butterfly net does wonders for your tennis game), but a physical barrier such as an old net curtain (you can usually pick them up for a song at op shops) can protect vulnerable crops – throw one over your berries too. Look out for the butterflies' yellow, oval eggs on the underside of the leaves of your brassicas and pick them off by hand. If the caterpillars are already established on your brassicas, dunk the heads in a bucket of water after you harvest them. The caterpillars should all float to the top. If you want to take more direct action, Yates have released a new product called Yates Success Ultra (the latest generation of its Yates Success Naturalyte), which is effective against most caterpillars. The active constituent is spinosad, a beneficial soil bacteria that affects caterpillars without having much impact on beneficial bugs. It can also be used against thrips, TP psyllid, leaf rollers and codling moth.

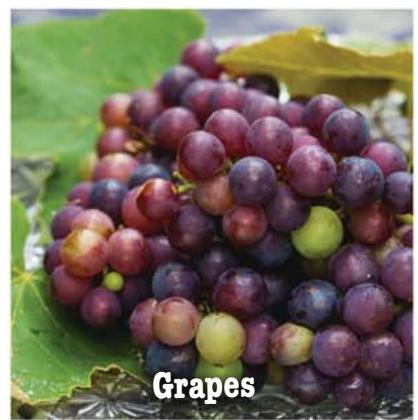
• **Not had much luck with capsicums in the past?** Try planting a couple of seedlings in pots (you'll have to buy seedlings – it's too late to sow them now). It means you can move them into your hothouse or a sheltered spot in the garden if the summer weather proves patchy. Look out for heirloom varieties – they can cope outside a little better than some of the modern hybrids that have been bred to cope only with glasshouse conditions – or try one of the very fast-to-fruit patio varieties bred for container growing. Like smaller-fruited eggplants or melons, they are ready far quicker than the large sorts. I have two of these in pots on the deck and I think I'll have ripe peppers on them as soon as Christmas (admittedly the peppers will be about as big as a ping-pong ball, but still). Give plants a boost with a dose of nitrogen fertiliser now, but once they start flowering, ease up on the nitrogen and give them something high in potassium to promote flower growth and fruit set. Any fertiliser designed for tomatoes is good for peppers and chillies, or look at the NPK value on the container. You want more K and less N. Homemade comfrey tea is good too.

• **Don't forget your garlic.** If your garlic (and shallots and onions) are infested with black aphids, it's because your plants are under stress – probably from a lack of water, but it could be competition around the plants if you've been remiss in your weeding. Give your plants a good soak and mulch well and they should



recover. You'll need to keep the water supply up for all these root crops from now on, in order to harvest good, fat bulbs.

• **Make your Christmas tipples** from the garden! Inspired by Virgil Evett's story in this issue, I am going to try my hand at making my own Pimm's to serve on Christmas Day this year (see the recipe on page 35). It sounds ridiculously easy – just oranges, gin and vermouth – and I have plenty of lemons, mint and strawberries to add. No cucumbers yet, but they grow like the clappers, so I should certainly have some soon! The fruit on my 'Orion' peach should be ready for Christmas Day, so I plan to serve homegrown Bellinis too as they are traditionally made with white-fleshed fruit.



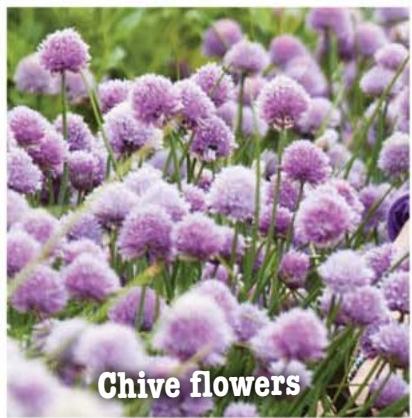
Grapes

• **Growing grapes?** It will break your heart to do it, but thin grape bunches (as in remove whole bunches) to encourage the remaining bunches to be bigger and sweeter. Trim back excessive foliage so the sun can reach the fruit too. Allow two to three bunches to ripen per runner and snap off the excess growth at a node. Don't let the trimmings go to waste. Make dolmas by stuffing tender, young vine leaves with spiced rice. While the long runners are still supple they can be twisted into wreaths or decorative balls.

• **Make sure you mulch everything.**

A good, thick layer of mulch can cut your watering by half (and reduce your water bill if you live in a region where you have to pay). A 10cm layer of compost around your vege crops will help keep moisture in the soil and add organic matter too. Just lay it after a real downpour, or give everything a massive soak first. Mulch on dry soil will actually keep water out!

MONTH...



Chive flowers

• **Eat flowers.** Throw the purple pom-pom flowers of chives in your salads (they taste mildly of onions); freeze the tiny blue flowers of borage in ice cubes to throw into your summer drinks (they add a subtle hint of cucumber) or decorate the summer trifle with freshly picked ones; or stuff zucchini flowers with soft cheeses, then batter and fry them (I'm not sure what raw zucchini flowers taste like, but stuffed and cooked they taste of crunchy cheesiness).

• Are you having Christmas at home?

Then sow more! Corn, courgettes, pumpkins, beans and peas can all go in now, as can gherkins, cucumbers and radishes. Sow a tray or two of lettuce now too. Once the summer weather really hits, keep seed trays and new seedlings in the shade or rig up a shelter with shade cloth. Don't stand them in a tray of water though, even if it's really hot. Soaking-wet soil causes just as many problems as letting things dry out!

• But if you are planning on heading away

for Christmas then hold off from sowing now. Now that it's warmer, everything will germinate quickly, but your plants need a bit of tender, loving care for the first few weeks to get them established. If you go on holiday you'll be leaving your fledglings before they can cope without you. Sow microgreens in pots and trays, or lettuces you can eat at a baby-leaf stage. Sow both thickly (as in, as thickly as grass) and take them on the road with you on your summer holiday. Yates does a nice seed mix called 'Baby Combo' which is a mix of red and green lettuces. So Christmassy! ☺



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2014
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of the year



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The 2014 Gardener of the Year is
Owen Takuira-Ngaropo

If you ask anyone in Papamoa about The Rock, the community garden that Owen Takuira-Ngaropo has developed in the seaside suburb, they invariably tell you one thing. "You have to come and see it. It's just amazing what Owen has created!" There is no doubt that Owen has inspired his neighbours – "Vote for this beautiful man, it's amazing what he has done for our community," wrote one on NZ Gardener's Facebook page. And now he's inspired readers of NZ Gardener too, who voted him the 2014 Tui Gardener of the Year.

Allan Bell helps out in the garden with a team of workers affectionately referred to by Owen as "Allan and his Angels". "You really have to see what Owen's created in just three years to understand the magnitude of it," he says. "This man has achieved almost miracles with nothing but sheer determination."

What Owen has built here is more than a productive garden that feeds people in his community, although the strip of council land behind Hartford Ave which is now The Rock garden is certainly that. Boxes of produce are distributed to local food banks, soup kitchens, the Salvation Army and local churches (it goes further afield sometimes too – last Christmas 17 banana boxes of fresh veges were sent to Tokoroa).

But he's also developed a space to help some of the most disadvantaged members of his community learn new skills, connect with people around them and sometimes make a brand new start.

It was hard work getting support at the beginning and Owen contributed a huge amount from his own personal finances to get the garden started. The council agreed to let Owen create the garden on the 0.8ha piece of land behind Hartford Ave, but Owen had to do the rest. "We had nothing at the start. It was just a disused mowing strip."

With the support of Allan and his Angels, Owen ran sausage sizzles outside Pak'nSave and Bunnings, as well as car boot sales to raise funds for the garden.

Fortunately, as word got out about what Owen wanted to create, local businesses came on board to provide support. Kings Seeds and Daltons donated seeds and supplies and HEB Construction provided a much-needed labour force and even helped create a road through the garden. Papamoa Plaza has recently made a generous financial donation as well.

When the garden was half established, Owen started to feel that the task of looking after it by himself was overwhelming. His prayers for some workers were answered when the Department of Corrections contacted him, asking if he would instruct periodic detention workers in the garden. "Some rough nuts come through here," says Owen, "but some of them are the best. These guys help create the garden, build things and construct fences."

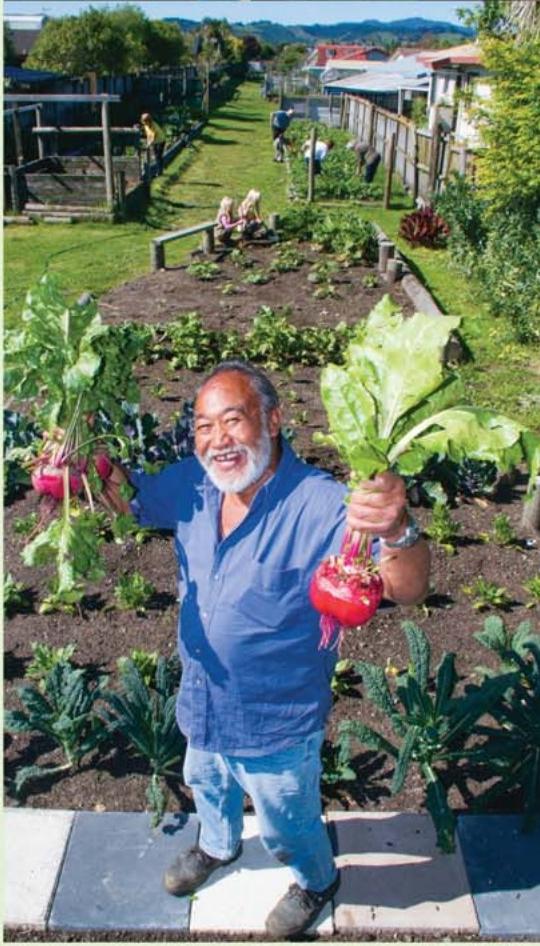
Owen has also overseen female PD workers in the garden. They have helped raise seedlings in his glasshouse, which backs on to the garden. He thinks that women are generally better at propagating because their hands are smaller.

Owen says his local community has been highly supportive of the garden too. "We've got drugs, gangs, the whole gamut here, but there's a lot of gold in our street as well. All the whanau can come here. We're the bees. We work together as one."

The garden is constantly buzzing with other visitors too, from the Papamoa Garden Circle to The Orchard Church's youth group, to politicians, such as former gardening TV host Maggie Barry (Owen sought advice from her, and from all the other expert visitors, on how to develop the garden).

Owen says many of the kids that visit the garden have never seen veges growing before. "They thought of food as coming from Pak'nSave and McDonalds. Now they're propagating tomatoes."

He's characteristically modest about what the garden does for his community. "I started it because there was a need for something like it," he says. "So I just ran with something I felt passionate about." ♣



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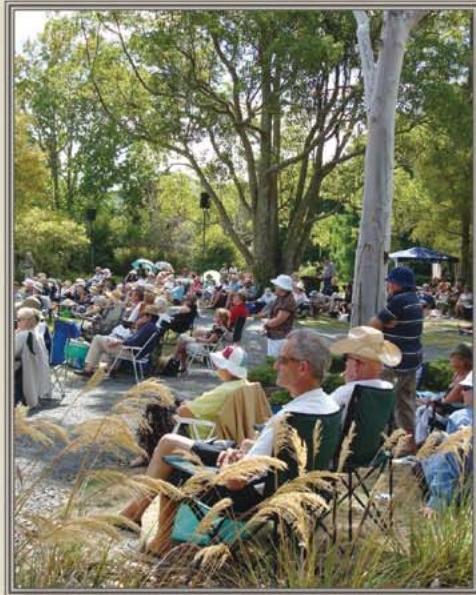
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PHIL CARSON

Customers to Green Door garden centre in Havelock North are amazed by co-owner Phil Carson's container-grown veges. He grows them to show customers the possibilities with this style of gardening.

Phil mainly grows chillies and peppers but always plants one grafted eggplant as well, which some might consider to be eye-wateringly expensive at around \$15, but he reckons it's an excellent investment. "The grafted plants start to fruit by Christmas, whereas a seedling would be unlikely to have ripe fruits before the end of February. Ten to fifteen fruits are produced per plant and they look stunning in a big pot."

He's a great fan of container-grown chillies, especially the variety 'Wildfire'. The fruits can stay on the plants till April and are still usable, whereas capsicums need to be picked as they ripen.

Phil's advises using a good-quality potting mix, then applying a liquid fertiliser every 10 days, one month from planting. Or simply top-dress the pots with Novatec, a three-month, slow-release version of Nitrophoska, one month after planting. He advises against using Nitrophoska on potted plants as it's too strong – it's fine on the garden though. Regular and thorough watering is essential when growing veges in pots.

While it's too late to plant chillies and peppers this season, there is still time to pot up tomatoes.

Vege masters

*From pots to hot crops
to sandy banks, seven
vege-growing experts
share their secrets for
a bumper harvest*

STORY & PHOTOS: JULIAN MATTHEWS



CLARE DOUGLAS

As head gardener at Ruth Pretty Catering on the Kapiti Coast, Clare Douglas is expert at producing what the chefs need, and visitors rave about her tomatoes, grown in the tunnel house and outdoors. She grows just a few varieties, including what Clare says are the best three cherry tomatoes: 'Sungold', 'Sun Cherry' and 'White Cherry', all prolific croppers, with flavours ranging from tart to sweet.

The standout tomato and the only large-fruited variety grown here is 'Isle of Capri', notable for its tangy flavour, dense red flesh and firm texture and the fact that it has just three seed chambers instead of the usual four. It is believed to have come to New Zealand with an Italian fisherman who was based in Nelson in the early 1950s.

Ruth uses them in salads with Zany Zeus creamy feta and freshly chopped basil, drizzled with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. International food and wine writer Curtis Marsh described this dish on his website (thewanderingpalate.com) as "a dish of the most extraordinary flavour and texture. In Ruth's words, 'This is the meal I would ask for if I was about to be hanged.'"

Clare grows potted seedlings of 'Isle of Capri' tomatoes, which are sold until Christmas at the Ruth Pretty shop in rural Te Horo.

Clare's top tomato-growing tip is mulching. She finds that keeping a good layer of organic material (recently she used conifer hedge clippings) is a very effective means of helping retain moisture. She also recommends getting to know your tomatoes. "Spend a little time in the evenings with a glass of wine in hand, observing what the plants are doing."

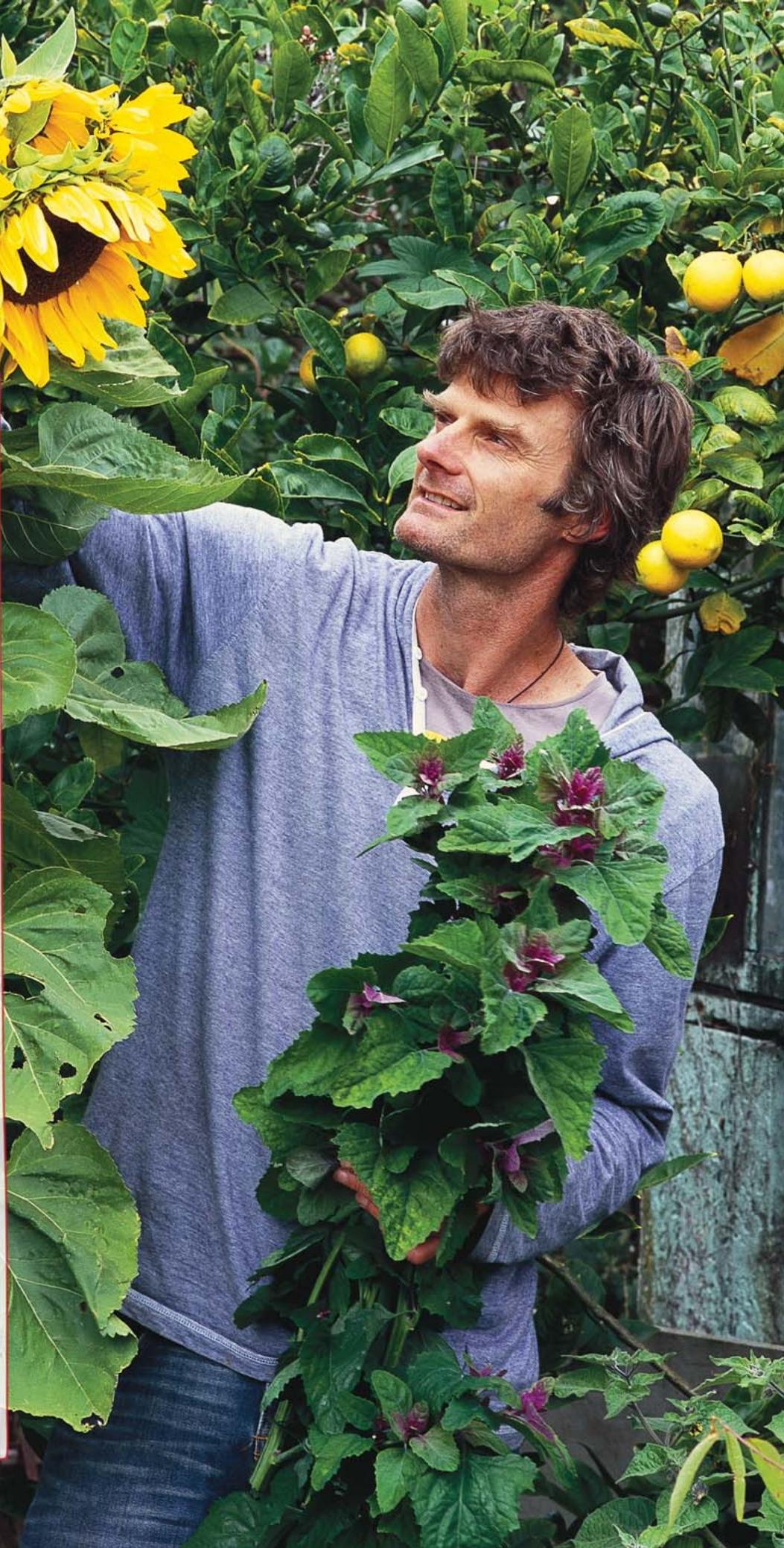
HUGH BROWN

Paekakariki resident Hugh Brown is a writer and vegetable gardener, and pretty skilful at both. He is the author of *Reach*, which won the Best First Book Award, young adult section, at the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards in 2013. Hugh gardens to be self-sufficient, growing a wide range of crops in a challenging, pure-sand situation. Compost is vital to improve the sand. "There's a huge compost heap on the front lawn right now," Hugh tells me. Out the back, where the land slopes severely, he has built a stone wall 4m out from the sandbank boundary and filled it with compost. Actually, a felled tree went in first, then branches, then finer stuff on top. So far it's been great for pumpkins, although it's still settling and sinking.

Hugh has chooks, which is why he sows lots of sunflowers every year, the seeds providing food for them. Among his more successful crops are garlic, early potatoes, broad beans and tomatoes, the latter producing enough to freeze for a year-round supply.

At one time he had lots of rabbits and ate them on a regular basis, but having to buy pellets to feed them didn't fit with his self-sufficiency philosophy.

An interesting summer crop of late has been magenta spreen, a type of orach, which grows around a metre tall and is decidedly ornamental. Hugh adds it to his breakfast smoothies, along with all sorts of things gathered from the garden, usually a grapefruit, a couple of kiwifruit, two raw eggs, kale and a small handful of chickweed. Several of his lady finger bananas are sometimes part of the smoothie mix too. The banana, gifted by a Kerikeri friend, also grows against the sunny stone wall.



GILLIAN THRUM

Unlike her life and business partner Phil Carson, Gillian Thrum of Green Door garden centre grows her vegetables at home in conditions which weren't ideal at the outset. "I dug into a bank, but the soil was heavy clay. Three years later it's a beautiful, crumbly loam."

Gillian achieved this transformation with green crops and her bokashi under-sink composting unit, which rapidly converts all kitchen scraps into compost in a matter of weeks. The bokashi compost material is buried in trenches in the clay and the liquid is used as fertiliser.

The green crop (now exclusively mustard, as lupins proved too unwieldy) is sown in autumn, grows over winter and is dug in at the beginning of August. "Until you've used green crops you can't believe what a difference they make to soil texture and fertility," says Gillian.

She adds that fertility is, of course, the key to productive vegetable gardening. She fills an old paint tin with a mixture of blood and bone, sheep pellets and general fertiliser and applies a generous dusting to the vegetable area several times over spring and summer.

As soon as Gillian spots the first white butterfly in summer she assembles row covers over hoops in her brassica area, an easy way to have spray-free crops of broccoli and cauliflower.

Zinnias are a summer feature among the vegetables, loved for their bright colours and bee-attracting qualities.





PETER RADCLIFFE

Peter, who lives high above the sea at Plimmerton, north of Wellington, used to climb mountains and even wrote a book about it (*Land of Mountains*).

These days his adventures are more of the walking and kayaking variety. His old karabiner, which once accompanied him on a long and arduous climbing trip in South and Central America, is now put to use in the garden, tensioning ropes to prevent an ancient and prolific 'Billington' plum from splitting in two.

Peter reckons it was while travelling in Mexico that he became interested in growing beans, intrigued by the sight of people out cultivating vast plantings of them as he went by on the bus. Also unforgettable, but not to be replicated, were the nearby fields of cannabis with armed guards toting machine guns.

A firm believer in recycling, Peter uses old pieces of gib board left over from house renovations as a mulch around the beans. "This provides lime and texture, helps keep the weeds down and the worms love it," he says.

He used to plant cherry tomatoes every year, but now he simply lets old fruits rot on the ground and next year they come up again and fruit bountifully.

Peter makes compost by piling up green waste in a corner of the garden, then running the rotary mower over it.

Gifts have helped with soil fertility too. Until recently his mother always gave him a bag of fertiliser for birthdays. Plus there's wood ash from the fire, which Peter likes to spread around the broccoli, "always in a certain breeze so it spreads easily".

"Actually I don't have a clue what I'm doing," Peter laughs, "but things grow well anyway."

SHANE MCCULLOCH

When Shane McCulloch planted 'Big Top' Asian bitter melons alongside the pick-your-own chillies he cultivates in huge tunnel houses on his Whanganui property, he had no idea what the reaction would be. "A lot of Asian customers come to pick the chillies. I didn't tell them I was growing bitter melons, so it was interesting to see their reaction when they ripened. They went crazy," he says. "I'm growing four times the quantity this summer."

Having tried the melons in a stir-fry, he's a little surprised at their popularity. "I thought they were awful," he says.

But he admits that he might not have the knack, or that it's an acquired taste. "I think my customers stuff the melons with curried mince mixtures and bake them," says Shane. They also say that the bitter melons are well known in their homelands as a remedy for diabetes.

Shane plants his bitter melons in early October in his tunnel houses, which is the best way of growing them, but he has heard of folk growing them outside against a sunny wall in Hawke's Bay.

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ROBYN GRANT

Robyn Grant is a purist vege gardener with no interest in ornamentals. She prefers to leave that side of things to her partner, a trained horticulturist.

She has to cope with pure sand and an elevated site at her Waikanae Beach property, so all her vege beds are raised and filled with organic matter. There's lots of mulching and they make compost, the ingredients including fine seaweed. Thorough watering is vital and takes place twice a day in summer.

Every two weeks a bag of horse manure is put into an old onion sack and soaked in a container of water. This is used as a liquid manure, avoiding any annoying lumpy bits when sowing seed.

There's a wide range of crops. Beans are swapped for fish with seafaring neighbours, tomatoes love the sunny site – a favourite is tangy 'Green Zebra'. There's also broccoli, garlic – which Robyn plaits and hangs in the kitchen – 'Jersey Benne' potatoes for Christmas, and heaps of salad greens. "We're big on healthy foods, so the vegetable garden is wonderful," says Robyn.



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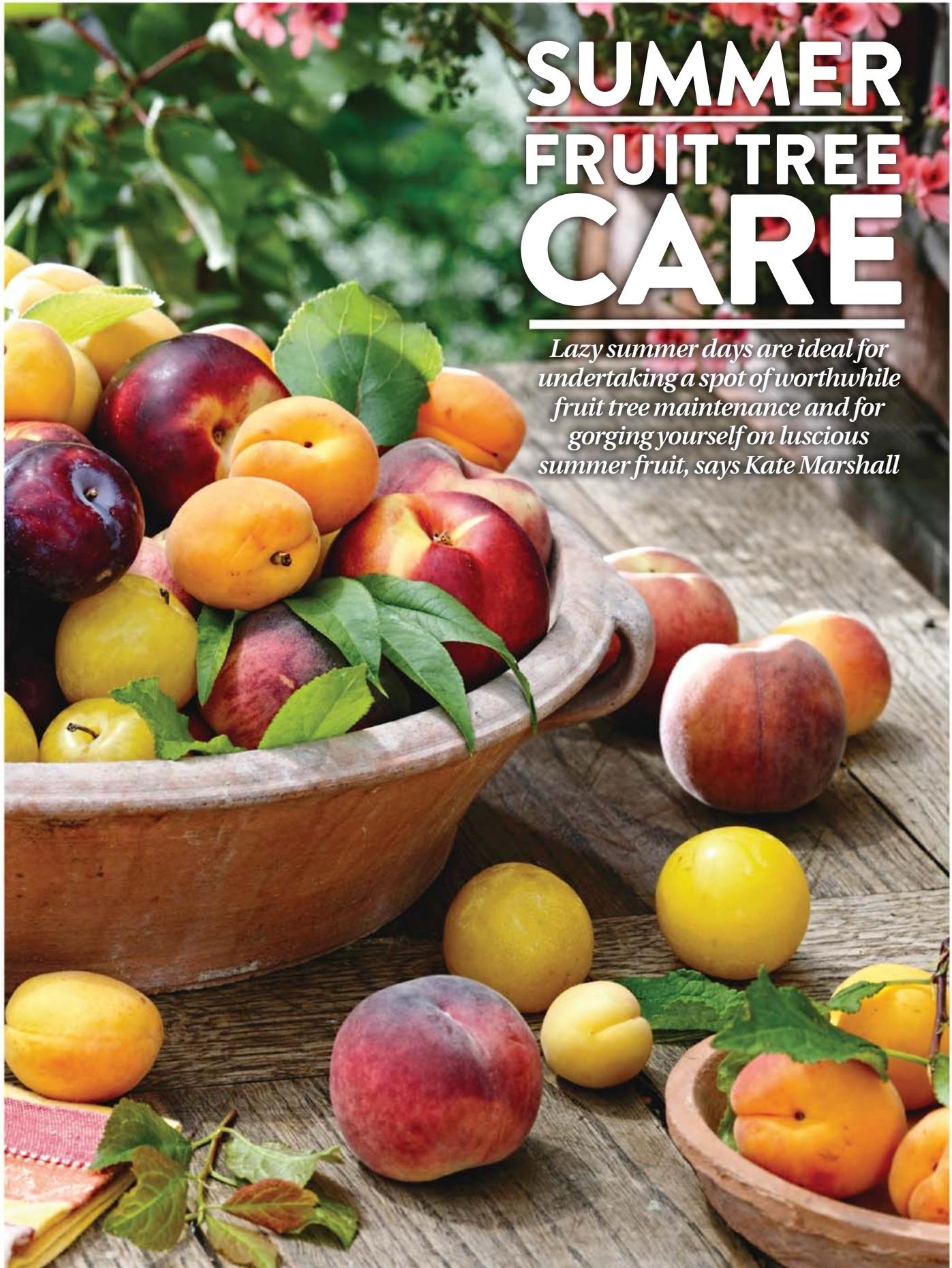
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SUMMER FRUIT TREE CARE

Lazy summer days are ideal for undertaking a spot of worthwhile fruit tree maintenance and for gorging yourself on luscious summer fruit, says Kate Marshall





The most exciting activity in home orchards is harvesting. Perfect picking is a combination of visual inspection, trial (and error) and experience.

Winter is the traditional time for fruit tree care, like planting, pruning and pest protection. But summer is a great time to be in the orchard, with lovely, long days to (hopefully) admire the ripening crop on your trees. And there are a few jobs you can complete under the summer sun that will improve your tree health, reduce tree height and improve the quantity and quality of your crop.

Watering and feeding

Water stress, caused by a lack of water altogether, or overwatering followed by underwatering, can cause the developing fruitlets to drop. Keep young trees well watered, providing a good drink at least once each week. Ideally, leave a hose dribbling in the “drip line” of the tree for an hour or so for a deep watering. Apply a thick layer of mulch like pea straw in a donut shape around the base of the tree. It’s important to keep mulch away from the trunk, in particular the bud union on a grafted tree (where the variety is connected to the rootstock) to prevent the bark from rotting. Mulch will provide a layer of insulation for the soil to reduce evaporation of moisture, as well as helping to suppress weeds from growing around the base of the tree (which would compete for precious water if allowed to establish).

During the summer months fruit trees are putting on new growth, along with sustaining a maturing crop. Just like a growing child, fruit trees need a balanced diet. Applying a “side dressing” (sprinkling a granular fertiliser on the ground around the tree) of a specialised fruit tree feed a couple of times through summer will provide the perfect balance of N, P and K. Nitrogen supports the leafy growth of branches, phosphorus promotes tree health and root development, and most importantly (and in the largest ratio), potassium looks after fruit growth earlier in summer and encourages the initiation of flower buds later in the season for the next crop.

Pruning

Summer pruning is one of the best ways to keep fruit trees small. Giving your trees a clip in December, then again in February, will slow down growth. Admittedly, this will also reduce the crop, which is a tough call. You may even prune some of the baby

fruits off, but as they say, no pain, no gain. Pruning during summer causes a small amount of stress on the tree, which stunts growth slightly. Also, by removing some leaf coverage, summer pruning reduces the available energy for the tree to use to grow. Successful summer pruning can keep a 10-year-old plum tree to 1.5m tall, compared to 4m-plus if left to grow untended. Best practice is to prune new growth back by half in December, followed by another clip taking half of the subsequent growth in February.

As with all pruning of fruit trees, care needs to be taken to prevent nasty bugs getting in through the wounds. Only prune on a sunny day when there are at least a few fine days forecast ahead. Pruning when rain is forecast is asking for trouble – diseases thrive in warm, wet conditions. Seal all pruning wounds that are thicker than your pinkie finger with a pruning paste like Bacseal. This will prevent diseases entering through the pruning wounds and also helps them heal quicker. Use clean, sharp secateurs, sterilising the blades with methylated spirits or bleach. A permanent part of my pruning kit is a wee sprayer bottle of meths and an old rag to wipe the blades. If pruning more than one tree, stop and clean the blades between each tree.

Pests and diseases

There are a few bugs and blights that can niggle fruit trees in the warmer months. Keep a close eye on your trees, inspecting the fruit, leaves and bark for signs of pests or diseases. Infestations and infections can develop rapidly, so regular examinations will help catch problems in the early stages. Brown rot on stonefruit is the most common disease and can devastate a crop within days. More common in humid conditions where it thrives, this fungal disease starts as small brown spots on the fruit, quickly spreading to cover the entire skin with powdery, tan-coloured mould and rotting the fruit. Prevention is best. Copper sprays in winter will suppress disease spurs that overwinter on the tree, as will removing any infected

“fruit mummies”. Brown rot is most likely to cause problems 2-4 weeks from harvest, when the sugar levels of the fruit are increasing. Applications of Yates Bravo fungicide during this period, every 10-14 days, is recommended. This product is safe to use up to one day from harvest.



Thinning

Exceptionally heavy crops benefit from "thinning", where a portion of the crop at the fruitlet stage (about 3cm wide) is removed. Most trees will naturally drop a portion of the crop, but you may need to thin more.

Usually November or December is the best time (though it may be earlier for early ripening varieties).

While it can be a bit heartbreaking to take fruit off your trees, there are a multitude of incentives.

Oversupplying risks branches breaking under the weight of the fruit, can cause biennial bearing (only fruiting every second year, in recovery after a heavy crop) and can cause damage to the fruit simply by it rubbing together or by encouraging brown rot to develop between the fruit.

Apples and pears should be thinned to bunches of two or three fruit.

Stonefruit should be thinned so that the fruit is spaced 5-10cm apart. Leave more fruit on the outer and upper branches of the tree, as these receive the most direct sunlight so will produce the biggest and best-flavoured fruit.

Harvesting

The most exciting summer activity in home orchards is harvesting. It can, however, sometimes be tricky to pick the fruit at just the right time. In orchards, growers use special tools to test sugar and starch levels for precise maturity. In home gardens, perfect picking is a combination of visual inspection, trial (and error) and experience.

Harvest stonefruit when the fruit gives slightly when pressed and when it has a delicious, sweet aroma. Harvest carefully to avoid bruising and blemishes, as these will cause fruit to rot rapidly. Flavour is best when tree ripened, but fruit picked a little too early can be brought to maturity by wrapping it in a linen tea towel or popping it in a paper bag and leaving it for a few days at room temperature.

Late in summer and into autumn, apples will be ripe for



picking. Most varieties are ready to harvest when the skin colour on the shady side of the fruit turns from green to yellow green. Another tip is to check the pips – their colour turns to dark brown when the fruit is ready to eat. Pick apples with the stem intact, by rolling the fruit upwards off the spur. Pears can be trickier as the fruit matures from the inside, outwards. Judge it by skin colour and taste. If the flesh close to the core is close to ready, it's time to pick. Pears mature well off the tree, so can be picked at this stage.

Raspberries and boysenberries are easy to harvest, as the fruit is ready to eat when it effortlessly separates from the hull (the white part connecting the fruit to the stem). If you have to tug the fruit at all, it isn't ready.

Blueberries can be trickier to harvest at the right time. Some varieties are ready to eat when the fruit turns dark blue, while others are best left for a week or two after changing colour. Taste testing will be your guide. Be sure to cover your bushes with netting, otherwise the local bird population will be the indicator that your berries are mature!

Plant a new tree

Summer holidays, a bit of time up our sleeves and the plethora of summer fruits may motivate some out-of-season planting. It is definitely possible to plant fruit trees with success in summer. It just requires a bit more care. Newly purchased trees should have their roots well soaked prior to planting by popping the pot into a bucket of water for an hour or two. A generous hole should be dug and soaked Saturaid crystals mixed into the soil. Use a strong stake with soft fabric ties (like torn strips off an old T-shirt) to provide support against summer wind. Apply a generous layer of moisture-retaining mulch around the base of the tree in a donut shape, clear of the trunk. Water the tree well once planted, and water deeply every two or three days throughout the remainder of summer.

sweet leaf

Super-sweet stevia puts sugar to shame, says Jane Wrigglesworth. It's calorie free, has no effect on blood-sugar levels and you can grow it yourself!



Stevia may sound too good to be true – no calories, no sugar, a natural sweetener. But this plant is getting a great deal of attention

When I give a talk on herbs to local garden clubs, *Stevia rebaudiana*, aka the sugar herb, is always the herb that gets the most interest. The leaves of this perennial herb are 20-30 times sweeter than sugar, and the glycoside compounds within it are 200-300 times sweeter. Those compounds are also resistant to heat, so the plant can be used in cooking and baking with no adverse effects. And all this with zero calories.

It may sound too good to be true – no calories, no sugar, a natural herbal sweetener, but it's a plant that's getting a great deal of attention on the world's stage. It's easy to grow and use too, but there are a few tricks to getting the most out of your stevia plants, and for using it in the kitchen.

Growing

Stevia is a tender perennial that is native to the subtropical regions of Paraguay and Brazil. In most areas in New Zealand the plant will die back in winter, but each spring new leaves emerge at the base of the plant. In colder areas, gardeners can move their plants into shelter over winter, as frosts will kill them, though I would be more inclined to treat them as annuals. Even in my Auckland garden I grow mine as annuals, as the plants never seem to be as good after the first year's growth.

Stevia is easily sown by seed (available from Egmont Seeds and Kings Seeds), or plants are often available from the herb section at garden centres, usually from late spring or early summer.

As plants grow, pinch off the growing tips so they branch out. If you don't, the plants will produce one or two stems that will grow straight up.

You'll get fewer leaves this way. A branching plant is much more prolific.

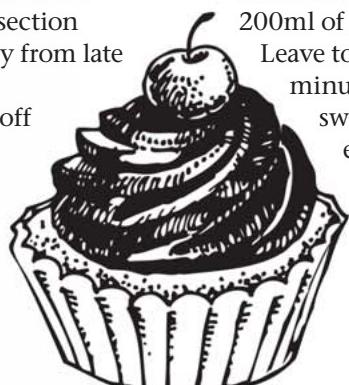
Stevia likes a reasonable amount of water, but the soil must be free draining. If plants sit in water, or the soil is constantly soggy, the roots may rot. Feeding isn't necessary if compost is added. Excess nitrogen will promote rapid growth with poor flavour.

Baking with stevia

Stevia can be used in baking, but you need to alter the recipe. Not only are you replacing the sugar, you need to replace the bulk that you've taken out. For example, 1 teaspoon of refined white stevia (from health shops) and 1 tablespoon of raw green stevia (powdered green leaves) equals 1 cup of sugar. If you take out 1 cup of sugar, you need to replace that bulk by adding extra dry and, possibly, wet ingredients. This is really done by experimentation. Examine the consistency. If it's too wet, add more flour or other dry ingredients. You could also use something like pureed apple or zucchini to bulk it out, but be aware this also adds extra moisture. Before adding to your batter, place the zucchini or apple in a strainer first, and leave to drain for a couple of hours.

Using fresh leaves

You can use fresh stevia leaves straight from the garden to sweeten your food and drinks. To make a very simply liquid sweetener, place 1-2 bruised leaves in a cup and add 200ml of freshly boiled water. Leave to stand for 10-15 minutes, then taste for sweetness. If it's not sweet enough, leave it to steep longer. Then add the required amount of liquid stevia to your beverage or food.



Dried leaves

Leaves can be dried and added to food and beverages in powdered form. This is how I prefer to use stevia, and it means you have a constant supply of it throughout winter.

To dry, harvest the leaves just before stevia flowers in autumn, when sweetness is at its highest. The leaves have a bitter taste after flowering.

Cut stems and hang them up to dry in a warm, dry, airy spot. When dry, store the leaves in an airtight container and crush just before using, or remove the stems and central vein and grind them into a fine powder. This is what I use for most of my recipes.

Flavour

The taste of stevia is not identical to sugar. Some people complain of a bitter aftertaste. I think it's more that stevia doesn't give people the same sugary flavour. But that's like adding carob to a recipe in place of chocolate and expecting it to taste exactly like chocolate – stevia has its own taste. Add the right ingredients to complement its flavour and you won't get that "bitter aftertaste".

Preservation

Without sugar, your jams and fruit preserves will not last as long. If making sugarless jam in bulk, freeze and remove from the freezer when needed. Or halve or quarter your recipes. For pickles and chutneys, the vinegar acts as a preservative.

Stevia recipes

For the following recipes, I use raw stevia powder, which is simply the powdered dried leaves. You can also use the refined white stevia powder available from health shops. The white powder is sweeter, so use less. You may also want to check the ingredients – sometimes the white stevia has a filler or other ingredients added to it.

Ingredients •

SUGAR-FREE STEVIA RECIPES

NO-SUGAR MANGO CHUTNEY

Ingredients • 500g mango flesh

- 400g tomatoes, peeled and chopped (you can use tinned tomatoes)
- 2 onions, chopped
- ½ cup raisins
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 1 tablespoon raw stevia powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ cup lemon juice
- 1½ cups apple cider vinegar (you can use malt vinegar)



Mix ingredients

together in a non-aluminium bowl. Stand for 12 hours, stirring occasionally. Pour into a stainless-steel saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, until thick (1-1½ hours). Pour into sterilised jars.

NO-SUGAR CORN RELISH

Ingredients • 2 cups corn kernels

- 900g tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1½ cups shredded cabbage
- 1 red capsicum, chopped
- 1 large cucumber, chopped
- ¾ cup vinegar
- 1½ tablespoons salt
- 1½ teaspoons celery seeds
- 1½ teaspoons mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 tablespoon raw stevia powder

Combine all ingredients in a large non-aluminium saucepan. Bring to the boil, then simmer, uncovered, for 40 minutes. Pour into sterilised jars.

QUICK RASPBERRY CHIA JAM

Ingredients • 1 cup frozen raspberries (or berry of your choice)

- juice ½ lemon
- pinch salt
- ½ teaspoon (or more) raw stevia powder
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds

Combine frozen raspberries, lemon juice, salt and stevia in a small saucepan and heat over low heat (1-2 minutes). Mash berries with a fork and stir until broken down to a consistency you're happy with. Taste, add additional stevia if you prefer it sweeter. Add chia seeds and mix well. Pour into a jam jar and refrigerate for 1 hour to set.

NO-SUGAR LEMON CURD

Using raw stevia powder will give your lemon curd a greenish tinge. If you want to avoid this, use refined white stevia powder instead. Make sure you use less of the white stevia powder (1 teaspoon white stevia = 1 cup sugar, 1 tablespoon raw stevia = 1 cup sugar).

Ingredients • 4 egg yolks

- 1 whole egg
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest
- ½ cup lemon juice
- 125g butter, roughly cut into cubes
- pinch salt
- 2-3 tablespoons raw stevia powder

Beat the yolks and whole egg together until foamy. Set aside. Place lemon zest, juice, butter, salt and stevia in a double boiler over medium heat, and mix until butter has melted. Add egg mixture and whisk constantly until the curd is smooth and has thickened. Press through a fine sieve to remove the zest, then pour into sterilised jars.

STEWED RHUBARB

Ingredients • 400g rhubarb cut into 3cm pieces

- 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon raw stevia powder
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Add all ingredients to a saucepan. Cover and simmer gently on a low heat, stirring occasionally, for 10-12 minutes or until rhubarb is tender. Taste and add more stevia if required. ♣



SWEET TALK

A TEASPOON OF STEVIA HAS THE SAME AMOUNT OF SWEETNESS AS AN ENTIRE CUP OF SUGAR BUT HAS NO EFFECT ON BLOOD-SUGAR LEVELS, MAKING IT AN IDEAL SWEETENER FOR DIABETICS. IT ALSO CONTAINS NO CALORIES AND CAN HELP SATISFY SUGAR CRAVINGS.

SEASONAL PRESERVE

Dandelion wine

BOTTLE SOME SUNSHINE FOR A GOLDEN TIPPLE

TURN WEEDS INTO WINE

Dandelion wine has a sherry-like flavour that improves with age.

GATHER 120-160 DANDELION

flowers (about 1 litre) in full sun and put them in a large heatproof container. The flowers wilt very quickly, so pour 2 litres boiling water over the top as soon as possible after picking. Cover and leave for a couple of days, stirring

occasionally. Strain through muslin or a jam bag into a 1-gallon jar and add 1kg sugar and 2 teaspoons dried yeast, stirring until completely dissolved. Add the grated rind and juice of 2 oranges or lemons and top up with more boiling water if necessary. Seal the jar with an airlock and leave for around three weeks or until the bubbling subsides. Syphon into a clean bottle and store.





GROW YOUR OWN COCKTAILS

Virgil Evetts shares a few refreshing ideas on giving your summer produce a starring role in some tasty seasonal tipples

Whether they're wanton or chaste, in the sticky heat of summer, cocktails can quench thirst and restore (ahem) spirits like little else. Personally, I've never much liked alcohol in the hot months. It's a headachy enough time of year without provoking things further. But when I do imbibe I'm most inclined towards things iced and juicy that don't really taste like liquor.

Christmas is a fine excuse or motivation to dust off the cocktail shaker and whip up something fancy, all the better if you can draw upon the provender of your garden for inspiration and substance.

Depending on what you grow, you'll likely have plenty of mouth-watering options – fresh strawberries, raspberries, early stone fruit, including peaches and Japanese plums, citrus of at least a few lingering kinds – more so if you had the good sense to freeze surplus juice back in winter.

The summer herb garden has much to offer the bartender too – mints of various kinds, lemongrass, verbena, balm and myrtle, stevia, kaffir lime, sorrel, rhubarb, lavender and even acrid, invigorating wormwood. The only real limit is your own good taste. Well that and plant toxicity I suppose.

PLOT TO PLATE

SUMMER SIPS

Dust off your cocktail shaker and whip up these refreshing numbers

1 Lime is surely the most cooling of all citrus juices. Even without the addition of alcohol it's the thirst quencher of choice in tropical climes from Southeast Asia to Central and South America. The standard spiked homage to the lime in the New World is the **MARGARITA** – lime juice, tequila, triple sec (orange-flavoured liqueur) a bit of sugar and a narrow frosting of salt. Alcohol and syrup ratios are flexible, but the taste of fresh lime juice should always dominate. Unfortunately, as limes bear their fruit in winter many a margarita is made from cordial premix rather than the real deal.

2 Make ice for when the suns shines... A little forward planning is required if you take your margaritas seriously.

Make **LIME JUICE ICE CUBES** in winter when the fruit are plentiful and transfer to sealed bags once frozen. A little finely grated zest added to the juice will knock the lime quotient into the stratosphere. Avoid over-salting the rim of your glasses. Far better a brackish edge than a saline "a-salt"!

3 The **SINGAPORE SLING** is the signature drink of the great and grand Raffles Hotel in Singapore and my cocktail of choice everywhere. Surprisingly, the version served on Singapore Airlines flights is as good as any you'll taste at ground level – thus influencing my choice of carriers when booking flights abroad. In its original form, the sling is made from pineapple juice, lime juice, grenadine, Cointreau (or Grand Marnier), cherry brandy, gin and a mere hint of Bénédictine. It's about as luscious, cooling and dangerously drinkable as any cocktail can ever be. Making the sling from homegrown produce is a bit tricky in New Zealand when it comes to the pineapple juice, but this can be appropriately substituted with feijoa, babaco and even yellow cattley guava. It won't taste quite the same as the original, but it'll still go down a treat when lounging in the shade on your rattan suite this summer.

4 Amaretto is an almond-flavoured liqueur that is great in coffee and that adds a rich marzipan fragrance to cocktails. It's traditionally made from bitter almonds, which are not grown or sold here due to their moderate degree of toxicity. A much safer, but still very almondly version, can be made at home from sun-dried and cracked loquat kernels. Soak 1 cup of kernels in a litre of vodka for about six months. Sweeten to taste with sugar syrup and use in place of amaretto. Blend **LOQUAT-STONE AMARETTO** with almond milk, white grapes and ice for an almost-nutritious heat buster.

5 The **BELLINI** is a modern Italian classic, created at the perennially chichi Harry's Bar in Venice (also the birthplace of beef carpaccio) in 1945. It's made from nothing more than the pulpy juice of white peaches and icy cold Prosecco, Northern Italy's often exemplary take on Champagne. One of the simplest of all cocktails, it relies absolutely on perfect peaches and just enough cold, sparkling wine, simply stirred together and served. Squeeze ripe peaches to a pulp by hand. Force through a sieve, chill and mix 1:2 with dry, sparkling white wine. For something cutely kiwi, use 'Blackboy' peaches instead, blended with sparkling rosé. If the standard Bellini lacks sufficient punch for your tastes, try adding a small measure of grappa to bring out the peach flavour.

CHERRY CHEER

6 **CHERRY BRANDY** features in many cocktails. Remove stems from ripe, whole cherries and prick them all over before filling a large jar to the top. Add enough caster sugar to fill the jar a third from the bottom. Fill the jar with brandy, seal and store in a cool, dark place for at least six weeks. Add cracked cherry stones for an almond flavour. Although only mildly edible fresh, sour cherries are the source of all true cherry liqueurs, sweets and cordials. They're not grown commercially here, but trees are widely available.



7 The syrupy, duckling-hued Italian liqueur **LIMONCELLO** is a fine tipple when served by the shot measure, ice cold from the freezer. Grate or peel the zest of at least 10 lemons, preferably 'Villa Franca' or 'Yen Ben' ('Meyer' is an orange/lemon hybrid and as such doesn't impart a true lemony flavour), taking care not to leave any pith, which gives a bitter aftertaste. Add to a large jar and pour over a 1200ml bottle of vodka. Seal and leave in a dark place for about four weeks. Strain and discard the zest. Sweeten to taste with strong sugar syrup made with water at a ratio of 1:1. Store in the freezer. Providing you haven't skimped on vodka quality, the liqueur will not solidify at low temperatures. You can also use limes or Seville oranges.

8 Limoncello et al. also make excellent mixers, with concentrated flavours truer of the source material than any amount of juice. Alternatively, for an after-dinner special, serve up a frothy **LIMONCELLO HOT SHOT!** A quick blast to the liquor from a coffee-machine milk frother does the job nicely.

9 At the other end of the spectrum use limoncello as the flavour base for a slushy and leg-loosening **SPIKED SORBET**. A little fresh zest and a drop or two of bitters completes the picture nicely.

10 When I was a kid, Mum always gave me the warm juice from stewed rhubarb as treat. Once chilled, this syrup makes the basis for a sublime **RHUBARB REVIVER** cocktail. Try blending it 1:2 with freshly squeezed orange juice, a few drops of orange blossom water and the same of bitters. Up the ante with a little vodka and/or Pernod if you wish.

11 To make your own somewhat abbreviated (but perfectly serviceable) **HOMEMADE BITTERS**, cover 2 cups crushed green walnuts (picked before Christmas before the nuts harden) with vodka. Add the zest of 2 oranges and a sprig of wormwood. Seal and place outdoors in a sunny spot for six months. Strain, re-bottle and use with a delicate hand – it's very bitter! This is effectively a concentrated, unsweetened version of the very fine Italian liqueur, nocino.

12 Nobody does a fruit shake quite like the Vietnamese. Combine frozen fruit, such as papaya, cherimoya, watermelon, mango, babaco or pineapple with sugar to taste and evaporated milk. Blend to an ice-cold, creamy slurry. Serve your **VIETNAMESE FRUIT SHAKE** at the hottest part of the day, with a spoon and oversized straw.

13 Intensely flavoured berry cocktails start with an unsweetened **COULIS BASE** by simmering and crushing the fruit with a splash of water. Force through a sieve when soft and pulpy. Freeze for use as required. Try raspberry with rosewater, orange juice and hint of grenadine

14 To make the best **LEMON CORDIAL** ever, add the finely grated zest and juice of 5 lemons, along with a pinch of salt, to a litre of strong sugar syrup (2:1 with water). Bring to the boil for 3 minutes. Cover and set aside for 12 hours or overnight. Re-boil, strain and bottle. Dilute roughly 1:10 with chilled water – preferably sparkling.

15 Forget plum duff. Pour yourself a non-alcoholic **PLUM MOJITO** instead. Muddle or mash together ¼ cup sugar syrup (1:1 with water), the juice of ½ lemon or lime, 2 finely chopped plums and 12 mint or basil leaves. Pour one-third of the mixture over ice in a glass and top with sparkling water to taste. You could also add white rum to this if you wish. Other great summer fruit for mojitos are berries, watermelon, and super-cooling cucumber and mint.

16 You don't have to play polo to enjoy **PIMM'S CUP**, the essential British summer drink. Combine Pimm's 1:3 with lemonade in glasses half filled with ice and slices of orange, lemon, cucumber, strawberry and a sprig of mint. You can even make your own Pimm's from scratch by adding 1 sliced orange, 1 teaspoon bitter dried orange peel (optional), ¾ cup London dry gin and 1 cup sweet vermouth to a jar. Seal and shake, then leave for 24-72 hours before straining through a sieve and filtering through cheesecloth or a coffee filter into a bottle.

17 Or concoct a surprisingly good **VIRGIN PIMM'S** by combining 1 litre of lemonade, 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar and the usual fruit and mint.

SUMMER TOAST

18 Serve a jug of berry-licious fizzing, pink **BERRY SPRITZER**. In a blender, blitz frozen or fresh berries of your choice, with sugar syrup (1:1 ratio of sugar and water) and ½ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice. Press the mixture through a sieve and discard the solids. Pour into a jug and top with sparkling wine, lemonade or soda water. Pour over ice into glasses with added berries and herbs for some festive prettiness. ♡



EARS TO THE GROUND

Earwigs have a reputation for being pests, and it's undeserved, says Ruud Kleinpaste



You'll often find an earwig in the vicinity of an aphid-ridden rose or a scale-infested orchid.

for as long as I can remember I have been battling a buggy battle against gardeners who truly believe that earwigs are garden pests. The same people also believe that earwigs are pests of ears, as they allegedly enter these orifices when the human owner is fast asleep.

I always joke that the latter comment is probably truer than the first one: earwigs are rarely "pests" in the garden!

Our commonest earwig species hails from Europe. *Forficula auricularia* is the creature we often see but generally know so very little about. The fact that every book on the planet labels them as "pests" makes us grab the insecticide can and think no further. Yet a wee look into their daily life shows us some unexpected facts.

There's no doubt that these earwigs nibble on the odd succulent plant material (your tender lettuce leaves and dahlia petals) in spring and summer – they will even suck some moisture out of a ripe peach or plum hanging from the tree in the warm summer sun. And strawberries, close to the ground, are a fabulous source of moisture, especially when the summer is dry and moisture is in short supply.

But honestly, the damage is absolutely minimal and it certainly isn't going to kill any plant any time soon. After all, a wee bit of pruning has never really hurt a botanical specimen, as regrowth will always restore the deficit.

These earwigs live on, in, or close to the ground most of their lives. It's where the eggs are laid in very early spring, under stones or in an earthen cell just below the surface. This is where the female will guard her brood and even after the babies hatch from their eggs her maternal instincts make her stay with the offspring.

Maternal care seems to be a common trait among earwig species – I've observed it often with the specimens I've kept in captivity.

When the youngsters have shed their skin for the first time, Mum may open

the nest cell to let them wander off into the big, bad, dark world of the night. They often come back "home" again, before sunrise, probably guided by aggregation pheromones (smells that keep the family together in groups).

Earwigs have always been described as omnivores, specialising in no particular culinary preference but eating a wide variety of plant materials, pollen, lichens and especially protein in the form of dead insects and... live insects!

If you take a good, nocturnal look at these insects in spring and summer you may be surprised at how often you will find them in the vicinity of an aphid-ridden rose, a scale-infested orchid or a perennial under attack by small looper caterpillars.

This is really no great surprise as the omnivorous European earwig is probably one of the most important biological-control agents for small sap-sucking insects in European pip-fruit orchards!

There, the orchardists actively encourage these insects to set up shop in the trees by providing them with some snazzy clay-pot houses, filled with wads of straw.

And the timing is just perfect. In late spring and summer, well into autumn, the earwigs are mature and looking for protein to develop their reproductive systems. So a condominium high up in a great apple tree habitat is something the whole family of earwigs can't turn down.

I've always wondered if adding some of that aggregation pheromone to the straw would help in getting tenants quicker!

In autumn, when fruit is picked and the pest-control season is over, the earwigs mate and seek shelter in or near the soil again, ready for hibernation during cool winter months. The pair usually stick together in their subterranean Club Med, ears to the ground. ♣

WIGGING OUT

• A NATIVE PREDATOR

Some of our native earwigs show predatory tendencies as well. The shore earwig is an impressive, dark-coloured insect found under driftwood logs on beaches and in dunes.

It will tackle prey larger than itself – moths, beetles, blowflies and grubs are on the menu – often specimens damaged by wind or a storm on the beach.

The shore earwig female will stay with her eggs, cleaning them regularly until they hatch. The youngsters are cared for and fed small amounts of prey – it is really cute to see. But if the nest is disturbed she can also eat her eggs or offspring. This cannibalism is almost certainly an adaptation to living in a harsh environment where food shortages can be prolonged and every bit of protein is valuable!

• CROOKED PINCERS

No, those pincers or forceps (technically known as cerci) on an earwig's rear end are not toxic and certainly won't puncture your fingers! However, they can be used to capture and manipulate prey, or to defend themselves by "pinching" the attacker.

Earwig species with small wings can use their forceps to help fold the wings origami style and tuck them under their short wing covers.

You can tell male and female shore earwigs apart because the males' forceps are not symmetrical, while the females' are the same shape and size!

When you're near a beach this summer look for these magnificent insects. And when a male waves his pincers at you, just pretend he's signalling, thinking you're a potential mate.

DIY PROJECT

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MATERIALS

You need: • 2 x 1800mm x 900mm trellis panels with 50mm square mesh • 13m x 45mm x 35mm H3.2 fence capping • 4 x 1800mm x 100mm x 75mm fence posts • 1 x 1200mm x 150mm x 25mm fence paling • 2 litres Resene Waterborne Woodsman stain in 'Bushtrack' • 2 galvanised handles • 2 hook and eye latches • 6g x 38mm countersunk screws • 8g x 50mm countersunk screws • power saw • power drill • clamps

Cutting measurements

From the trellis panels cut: • 2 x 780mm x 685mm pieces • 2 x 780mm x 780mm pieces.

From the fence capping cut: • 4 x 720mm lengths • 12 x 820mm lengths • Cut the ends of each fence capping length at a 45° angle.

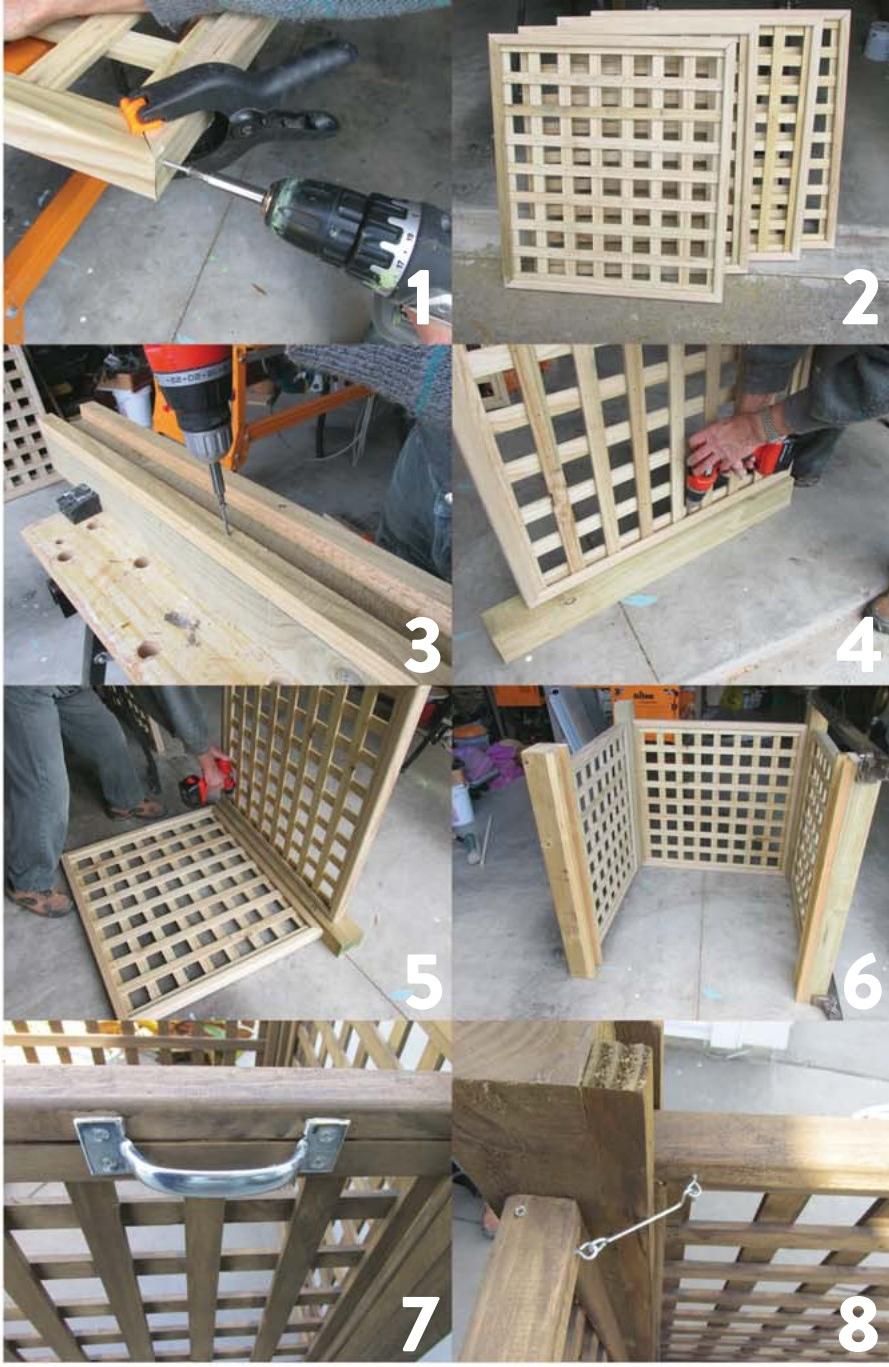
From the fence paling cut: • 4 x 900mm x 28mm lengths.

Cost \$236.52 (plus paint)



DIY COMPOST BIN

Speed up the composting process with this easy-to-build, well-aerated compost bin that has a simple sliding front panel, says Jane Wrigglesworth



1 Fit 4 x 720mm and 4 x 820mm capping lengths to the two smaller panels. Cut capping further, if necessary, to fit snug. Screw together, using 38mm screws.

2 Make up the larger panels, using the remaining fence capping lengths. Cut capping, if necessary, then screw in place.

3 To make the guides, position 2 x 900mm x 28mm fence paling lengths on the edges of one fence post (on 100mm side) and, using 50mm screws, screw in place. Repeat on the second fence post.

4 Attach the two smaller panels to posts without the guides (on 75mm side). Screw in between slats with 50mm screws.

5 Attach one of the large panels to the two posts that have the two smaller panels attached, to form a U-shape. Use 3 x 50mm screws per side.

6 Attach the two posts with the guides at the front of the compost box. Another set of hands or a large clamp is helpful here.

7 Cut the remaining piece of fence paling to fit across the length of the front panel beneath the capping. Screw. Stain bin. Attach handles when dry.

8 Slide front panel in place. Attach the hook and eye latches at the top of the front panel on the inside, at the corners, to keep the sides from pushing out.

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OUR PANEL THIS MONTH:
Lynda Hallinan, Shaun Caldwell, Kate Marshall, Kay Baxter

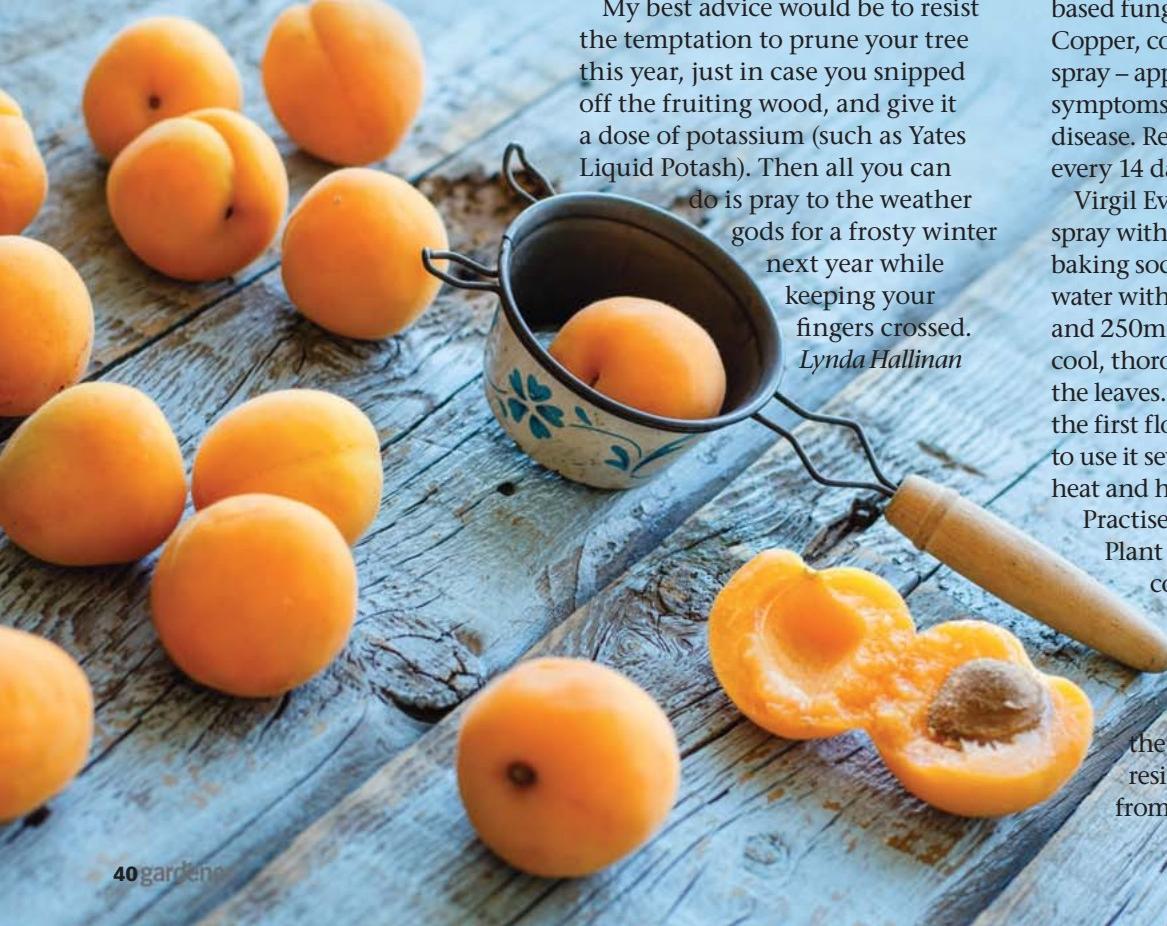
Ask an expert

FRUIT & VEGE GROWING ADVICE THIS MONTH



Q APRICOT ADVICE
My apricot tree has had no blossom this year, just leaves. It's growing in a wine barrel cut in half. I fed and trimmed it this year.

JOY BISHOP, CHRISTCHURCH



A Unlike nectarines, plums and peaches, apricots seem notoriously shy to blossom – let alone set fruit – if the climate isn't to their liking. They flourish in Central Otago, where it's freezing in winter, dry in spring and hot in summer, but elsewhere they can be hit and miss. That's because apricot trees won't initiate bud production unless they get a long blast of winter chill (though there are low-chill varieties available). In my Hunua garden I'm lucky to spot 10-12 blossoms (pictured) per tree, even though the peach trees right next to them are smothered in flowers.

My best advice would be to resist the temptation to prune your tree this year, just in case you snipped off the fruiting wood, and give it a dose of potassium (such as Yates Liquid Potash). Then all you can do is pray to the weather gods for a frosty winter next year while keeping your fingers crossed.
Lynda Hallinan

CUCUMBERS IN CRISIS

Every year I have problems growing both round apple and classic long cucumbers. The plants seem healthy, then mid-season they start to look very dry and they die.

LUCIE HOUBEN, TE AROHA

A We asked Shaun Caldwell from Yates for his advice and he reckons the cause is most likely a severe case of powdery mildew, which is common during warm, dry summer weather.

Plants can be infected well before any symptoms show up. A copper-based fungicide, such as Yates Liquid Copper, could be used as a preventive spray – apply it before you spot any symptoms, or at the first sign of disease. Repeat this spray treatment every 14 days to prevent infection.

Virgil Evetts' home remedy is to spray with a solution of 1 tablespoon baking soda dissolved in 500ml hot water with a small squirt of detergent and 250ml of full-cream milk. When cool, thoroughly coat both sides of the leaves. Start applying as soon as the first flowers appear and continue to use it several times a week as the heat and humidity increases.

Practise good garden hygiene too.

Plant cucumbers and their cousins – courgettes, squash, watermelons and pumpkins – in a new place each season.

Allow air flow around the plants and grow mildew-resistant types like 'Diva F1' from Kings Seeds. *Barbara Smith*



AILING PEAR
What is wrong with my pear tree? The show of blossom was great but now all the flower heads are turning black and crispy.

TREVOR MUNRO, CANTERBURY

A There are a few reasons that this may have occurred. Pears go black when they die. If this is happening in a few places, the branches may have been broken or strangled at some point.

It looks like the tree has sprouted away with the stored energy from within the tree, but has not been able to follow through with further new growth.

If the whole tree is affected, it's probably a root issue like phytophthora or just "wet feet" and, as above, this is the tree dying. Phytophthora or root rot is a fungus that spreads in wet, poorly drained conditions. To treat the soil, the recommended solution is Aliette, which is fairly readily available from garden centres.

Another possibility is fireblight. It's quite early for this disease to show up, but it's possible in warmer climates. The most common symptom is the end of the branch curling into a distinct "hockey stick" hook shape. Fireblight is very difficult to control – most likely it will cause the tree to die. It's a highly infectious bacterium that affects pears and apples and can be transmitted by wind, rain, insects and birds. Get rid of the diseased material carefully by burning it or sealing it in a rubbish bag.

Kate Marshall, Waimea Nurseries

PEAS PLEASE
These dwarf shell-out peas from the Koanga Institute have normal leaves and clusters of minuscule ones. Is this normal?

JUSTIN LOH, BANKS PENINSULA

A We sent your pictures to Kay Baxter from Koanga Institute. Kay says they are Te Anau salad peas, a New Zealand heritage dwarf pea which produces edible tendrils as well as a shell-out, or shelling, pea (as in a pea where you eat the peas inside, green or dried, rather than the eaten pod-and-all snow pea varieties). In fact all peas produce edible tendrils, but some are more palatable than others – and Te Anau's are particularly good.

Kay says the small shoot above the leaves on the left-hand side of the pic above shows the stage when tendrils are best picked for eating. By the time they open into little leaves like the ones on the right-hand side of the picture they are getting a bit tough.

Pea shoots have a concentrated pea flavour and can be used in salads, stir-fries, fritters, risotto or smoothies.

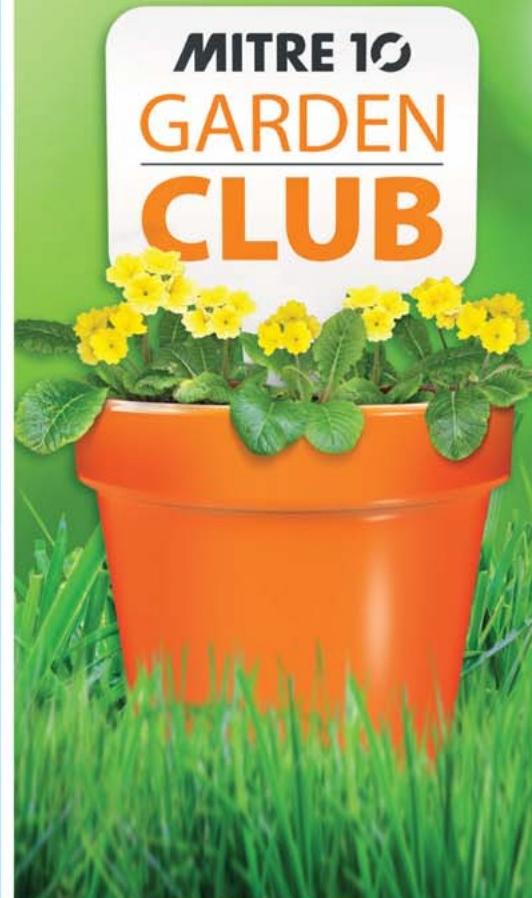
Pea shoots from other varieties can be used too, especially climbing snow peas, which can cope with some of the growing tips being removed without jeopardising the supply of pea pods. Or try 'Fiji Feathers' microgreens (from kingsseeds.co.nz) which are grown specially for the tendrils and have barely any leaves at all.

Te Anau salad peas came originally from a naturopath who had a special interest in highly nutritious plants.
Barbara Smith

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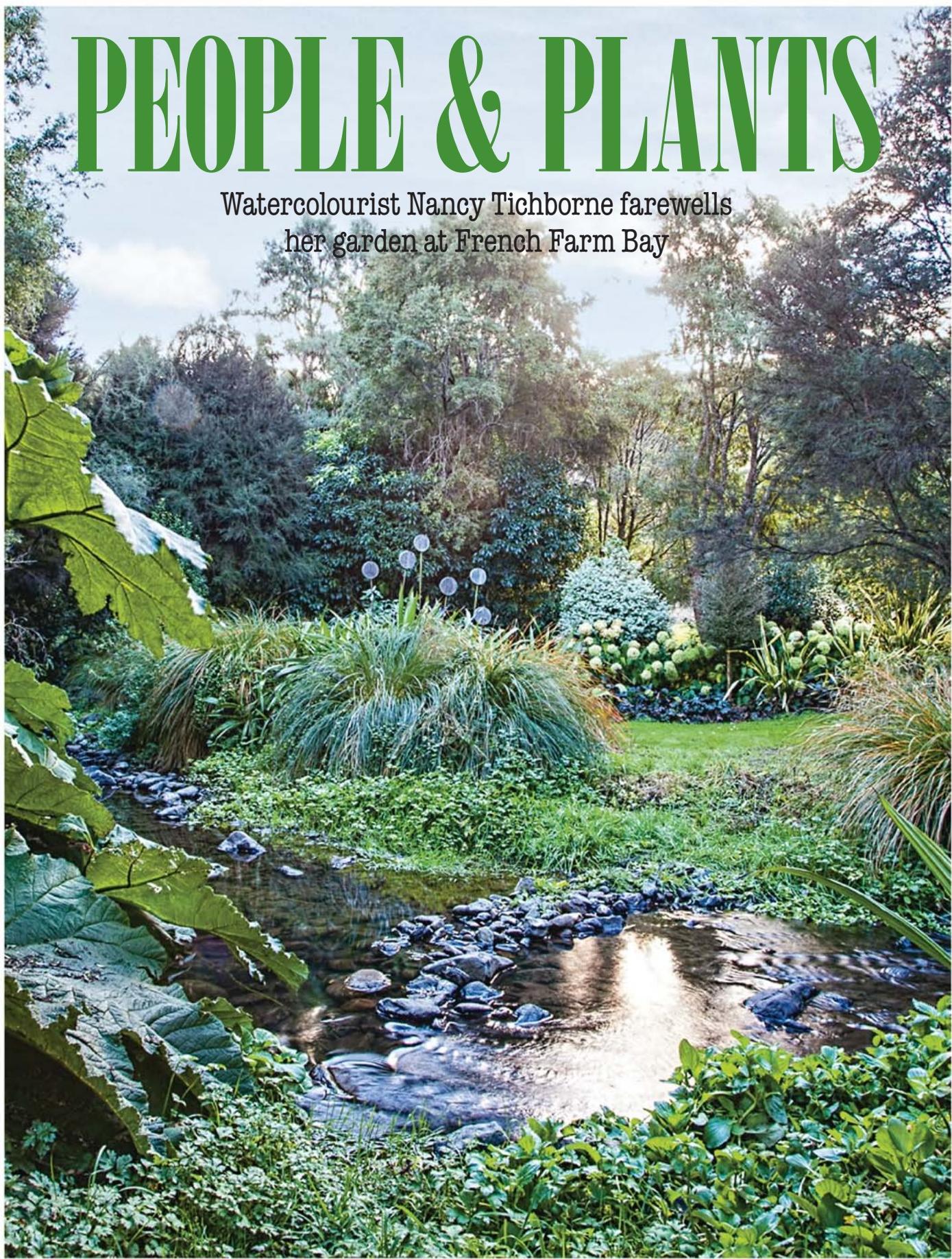
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PEOPLE & PLANTS

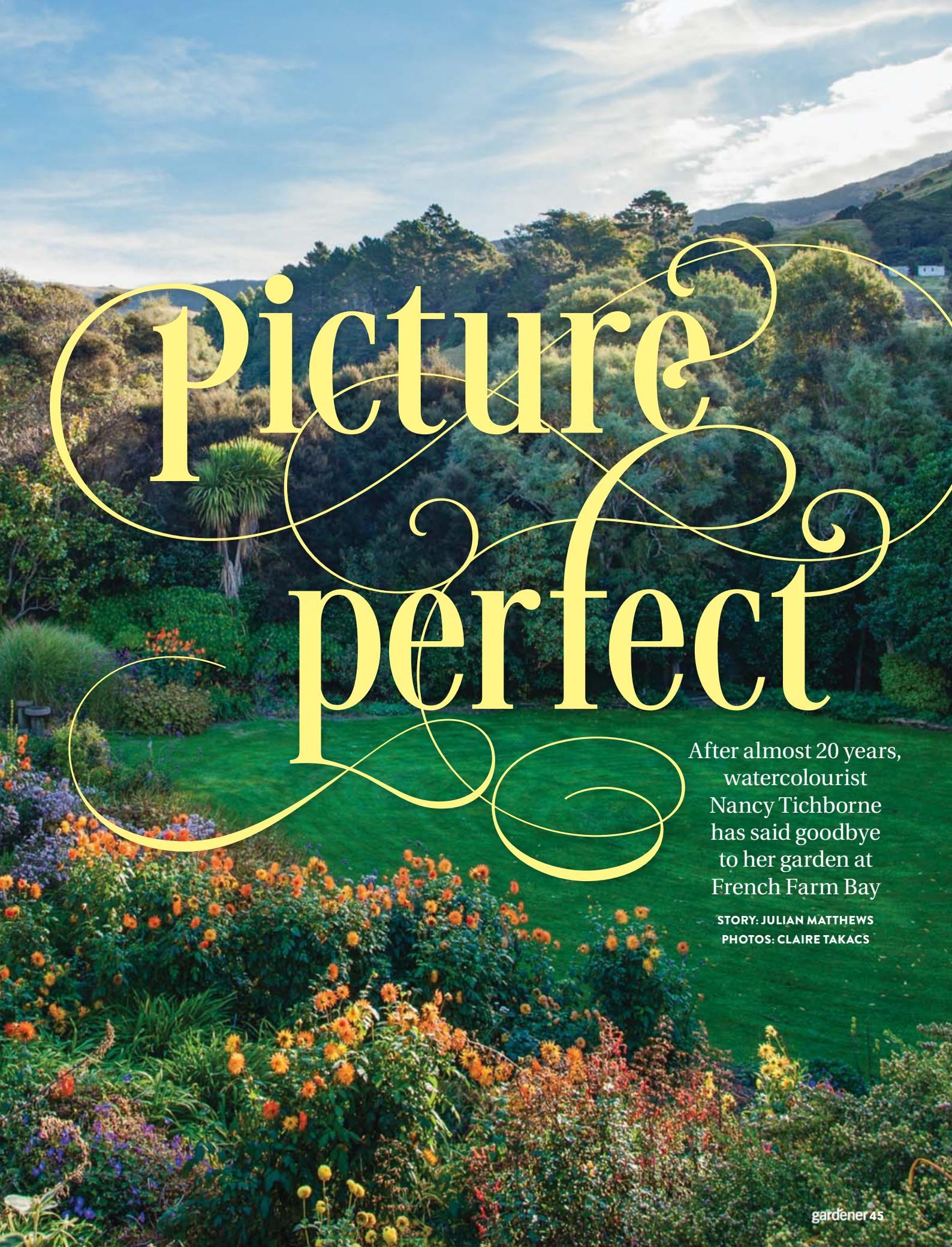
Watercolourist Nancy Tichborne farewells
her garden at French Farm Bay



SOUTH ISLAND

The rugged French Farm hills are a stunning backdrop for the garden. In this texturally rich planting, *Cornus kousa 'Miss Satomi'* takes centre stage among 'Cheyenne' dahlias and tussocks.





Picture perfect

After almost 20 years, watercolourist Nancy Tichborne has said goodbye to her garden at French Farm Bay

STORY: JULIAN MATTHEWS
PHOTOS: CLAIRE TAKACS



Mufti loved to pose for Nancy to paint her among the flowers.

What happens when the time comes to leave a much-loved but now too large and hard to manage garden? It's a problem which many of us have to confront as the years go by. Akaroa gardener and painter Nancy Tichborne has recently moved from her 4ha country garden to a much smaller one in town, and her thoughts on making the transition as painless as possible offer hope to others in a similar situation.

But let's step back a little, to the time when Nancy and husband Bryan started to make their very special, very large garden. Actually, it all began when Nancy and her two sisters were children. One of their shared joys on days when the weather kept them indoors was drawing images of where they would one day live – their dream home and garden and surroundings. Nancy never let go of this idea and when she and Bryan found land for sale at French Farm, across the harbour from historic Akaroa in Canterbury, she realised her dream had come true and they made the move from Rotorua.

"It had everything required to make my perfect garden," says Nancy. "There was a meandering stream, a swamp, a sunny paddock with rich soil, a steep hillside with huge, lichen-encrusted rocks, which was perfect as a backdrop for a house, and giant native trees alive with wood pigeons and bellbirds."

They built a house and made a garden, creating a lifestyle which was in many ways perfect. For Nancy, a very popular painter of watercolours featuring flowers and gardens, the garden was really a work of art, so all-absorbing that there was little time or energy left for painting. "I dreamed the garden night and day, even went

to sleep planning and plotting what I would do next." She says that while Bryan might not have been so totally absorbed by the project, he nonetheless got a huge kick out of growing firewood trees, including eucalyptus, alder and blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), ensuring they always had first-class dry wood for the fire. He's an expert at stacking wood, itself an art form when done well.

Bryan also ensured they had a ready supply of fresh eggs, looking after the hens which were allowed to roam freely during the day in their part of the garden, the supply of lush greens repaid with bright orange yolks.

The native bird life was a joy, increasing in numbers as the garden grew. "The wood pigeons flocked to the ripening crab apples and devoured the berries of pseudopanax. There were lots of bellbirds and they can be quite aggressive. I remember encountering three of them feasting on a nashi-pear fruit and instead of flying away as I approached, they stood their ground, then attacked me," recalls Nancy.

In recent years the garden was open to the public through the New Zealand Gardens Trust, which ranked it a Garden Of National Significance, thus ensuring a steady stream of visitors. "That was a really good thing," says Nancy, "being able to share the garden and meeting so many interesting, like-minded people."

In almost every way it became an impossible-to-leave garden, but Nancy, who is very much hands on, had been feeling for a few years that the time was coming when they would have to make a change. "It was time to start a new dream, in a much smaller place, and to let someone younger and more energetic take on the old garden."

A color photograph of a man and a woman in a lush garden. The man, on the left, wears glasses, a red and blue plaid shirt, and dark trousers; he has his arm around the woman and is holding a pair of pruning shears. The woman, on the right, wears a wide-brimmed straw hat, glasses, a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt, brown trousers, and red gardening gloves; she is laughing. They are standing in front of a large, vibrant patch of orange and yellow dahlias. In the background, there are more green bushes, a hillside, and a distant view of a valley under a blue sky with clouds.

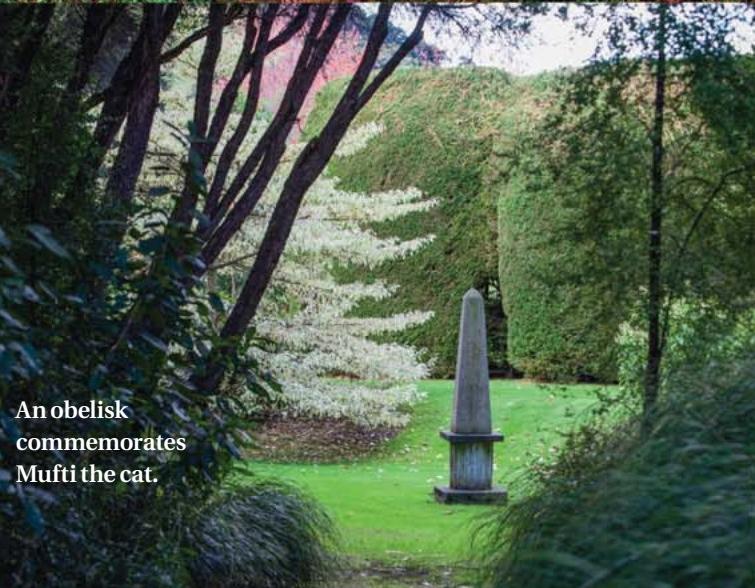
"Head gardener and her lackey,"
says Bryan Tichborne of their
happy horticultural partnership,
The dahlia is Nancy's much-loved
'Cheyenne' variety. "It's superb."

*"I dreamed the garden
night and day, even
went to sleep planning
and plotting what
I would do next."*

Nancy's fascination with pattern and texture is evident in this view of part of the garden as seen from an upstairs bedroom. The multi-headed tree at left is a native olearia, a striking contrast to the South African rush, *Elegia capensis*, in front. The variegated cabbage tree, *Cordyline australis* 'Albertii', to the right of the elegia, was cut down to ground level every few years, keeping it low and bold.



Te Waimangu
Stream, full of eels,
flows through the
lower reaches of
the garden.



An obelisk
commemorates
Mufti the cat.



The stunning bark
of *Prunus serrula*.



Clockwise from top left:
Autumn colour of *Sedum*
'Matrona'; Flowers on
Cornus kousa 'Satomi';
Dahlia 'Nuit d'Ete';
Variegated abelia.

Fortunately, the new owners, Jendy and Pat Brooks, are hugely enthusiastic gardeners and Nancy feels totally comfortable about them taking over.

She and Bryan wanted to leave the garden just as it was, so they decided that they wouldn't take any of the plants with them – not even a cutting or seedling, thus making for a totally fresh start. It means that the sense of anticipation in the new garden is high, there's much to dream and scheme about, which makes the relocation exciting rather than one of regret.

They've moved to a 30-year-old house, which they are renovating, plus there is a very old and historic, tumbledown shop right beside the footpath. "We're in an old part of Akaroa, rich in history, so the garden nearer the street needs to fit in with that," says Nancy.

She's also coming to grips with the need for curtains. "That's another big change. In our previous property we were so private that we never bothered about curtains, and double glazing meant we didn't need them for insulation. But here, passers-by can see into the house, so curtains are another thing on the must-have list."

Her priorities at the outset are to have a garden that has no lawns, no thorns and no hedges. It's a sunny site, even



Dahlia 'Nancy'

Dahlia 'Lady Darlene'

Self-sown dahlia seedling.

Deep burgundy Sedum 'Matrona' contrasts with fiery Dahlia 'Cheyenne', dark green pittosporum and medium green olearia.

"It was time to start a new dream, to let someone younger and more energetic take on the old garden."



Autumn gatherings from the garden, painted by Nancy.



more so now that two big, domineering phoenix palms have been removed. Just two old trees remain, one of which will be draped with large-flowered clematis.

When the builders have finished, Nancy will be able to walk straight out of her kitchen into the vegetable garden, which will occupy the best bit of ground, with rich soil, shelter and oodles of sunshine. Dwarf fruit trees, including the very useful feijoa 'Bambina', which grows just 1.5m high and crops profusely, will feature.

The lower level will be gravel paths and low-growing evergreen plants with bold foliage. Having plants with strong foliage appeal that retain their leaves during winter is considered important in their colder climate.

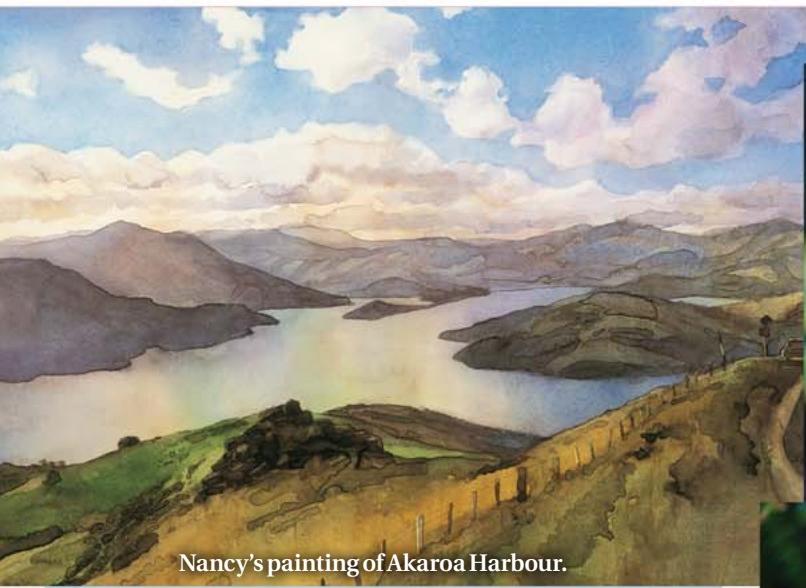
Nancy avoided growing roses in her old garden, but they will make an appearance in the new one. That might sound a little incongruous when her stated aim is to have a prickle-free garden, but there are some roses which are almost or entirely without thorns and these are the ones she will be growing. So far she has gathered 'Golden Showers' and 'Ghislaine de Féligonde' and more will follow.

Already Nancy can see in her mind's eye how the garden will look. She's anticipating how *Cotinus 'Grace'* will be enjoyed, with its deep bronze-red foliage seen against the

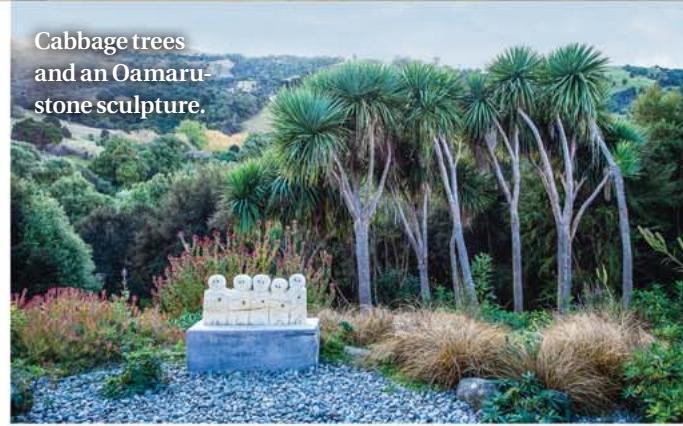
light so its translucence is emphasised, an effect akin to dark red stained glass. A silk tree is going in too, the red-flowered variety, *Albizia julibrissin 'Red Silk'*, loved for its flowers like balls of thread, fine foliage and vase-shaped form.

There will be more freedom with a smaller garden plus time to start painting again and to travel. That desire to come and go as the mood takes them means there won't be a cat, something which might come as a surprise to fans of Nancy's paintings, which now and again feature the most gorgeous felines imaginable. "They're so beguiling, but they're a tie, and it's so sad when they die," says Nancy. "When our last cat passed away, Bryan was heartbroken, which was quite a surprise for me as I've always thought of him as this tough army officer guy. It just goes to show the effect these animals have on people."

Precision will be a priority with the new garden. "I'll have the secateurs in my pocket every time I step outside as I know how important it is to have everything looking just right with a small space. You can get away with a lot more in a large garden where not everything is seen at once. Here I'm going to be making a mini picture and it's going to be great fun." ♦



Nancy's painting of Akaroa Harbour.



Cabbage trees
and an Oamaru-
stone sculpture.



Variegated geranium



Rimu



Native fern *Blechnum penna-marina*



Miscanthus 'Morning Light'

Foliage framework

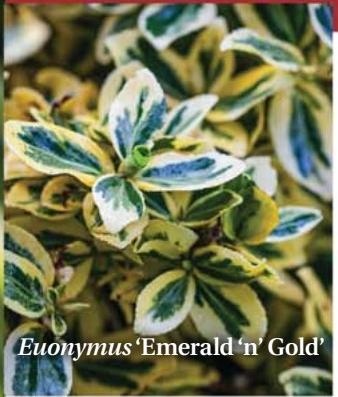
Foliage is an important component of the garden. It provides texture and year-round interest. Fine foliage is used to highlight bold leaves and dramatic flowers. Translucent foliage, such as *Cotinus 'Grace'*, is stunning when positioned so it is seen against the light. Repeat planting of fine foliage grasses such as *Carex testacea* makes plantings more natural and serves as a link between different styles of plants.



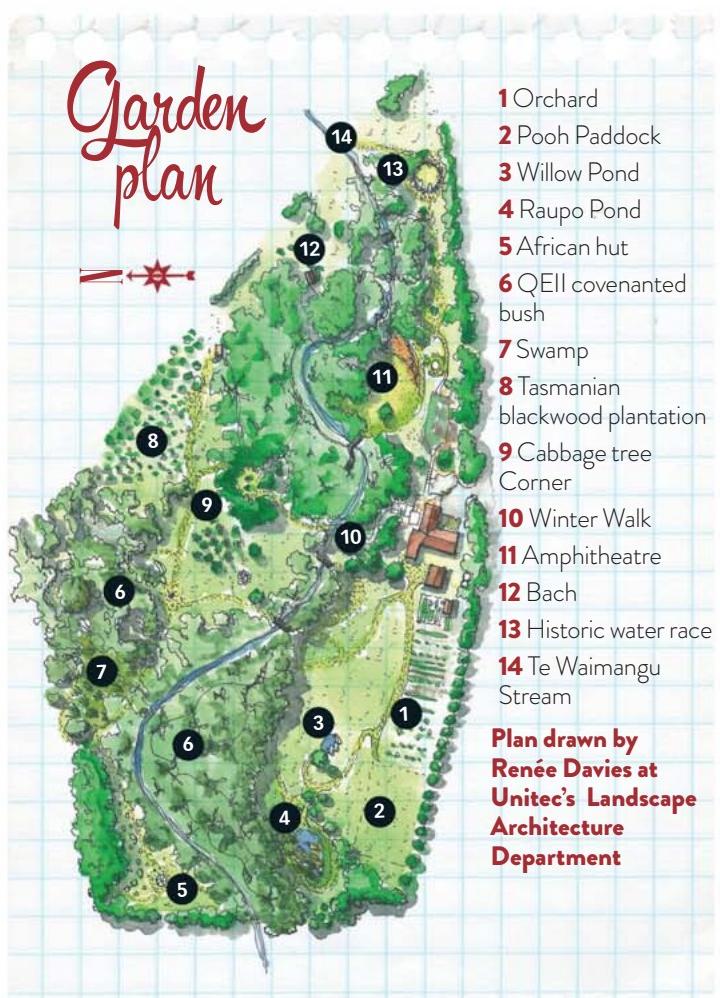
Carex testacea



Flax *Phormium 'Waitara Gold'*



Euonymus 'Emerald 'n' Gold'



- 1 Orchard
- 2 Pooh Paddock
- 3 Willow Pond
- 4 Raupo Pond
- 5 African hut
- 6 QEII covenanted bush
- 7 Swamp
- 8 Tasmanian blackwood plantation
- 9 Cabbage tree Corner
- 10 Winter Walk
- 11 Amphitheatre
- 12 Bach
- 13 Historic water race
- 14 Te Waimangu Stream

Plan drawn by
Renée Davies at
Unitec's Landscape
Architecture
Department

SMALL GARDEN

Mini estate

A small garden in suburban Auckland has been transformed into an English-style garden, complete with its own scooter path

STORY: JANE WRIGGLESWORTH
PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG



Jenny and Andrew Walker use their front garden to entertain and relax in. Low Japanese buxus forms a miniature knot garden planted with tulips, and star jasmine decorates the walls.

Right: Jenny Walker with daughter Estella (then aged 2), relaxing in the front garden.



"I love the garden. It's very therapeutic, and I do love having the water feature on."

You don't have to own a plot the size of a football field to accommodate a formal English-style garden. Jenny and Andrew Walker's masterfully designed property in suburban Auckland is home to green lawns, clipped hedges, several topiaries, a water feature, a small knot garden – and the house. All in just 620m².

"The house has a relatively small footprint because it's three storeys, so we actually have quite a lot of space around the house," explains Jenny.

The backbone of the garden incorporates shrubs, hedges and topiaries, with tall hedging (*Eugenia ventenatii*), commonly known as lilly pilly) playing backdrop to medium- (teucrium) and low-growing hedging (Japanese buxus). Standard topiaries of *Ficus microcarpa* var *hillii* complement smaller-growing English buxus topiaries, and espaliered star jasmine and camellias cover the plastered walls. It's the perfect picture of an English-style garden on a small scale.

However, 11 years ago, when the Walkers first purchased their property, the garden was nothing but an overgrown jungle, and the house hadn't been touched since the 1940s.

"It's a really gracious old home, built in 1920," says Jenny. "There was a big renovation done on it in 1940, where they put on a third storey and did the bathrooms, a basement and internal garaging, all sorts of things. But nothing had been done since the 1940s. It was totally original."



Clockwise from top left: Japanese buxus lines beds and creates neat hedges; Jenny and Estella walking in between eugenia and teucrium hedging; Three clipped *Ficus microcarpa* var *hillii* underplanted with tulips.



Garden plan

- 1 Driveway
 - 2 Feature entry gates
 - 3 Clipped specimen trees underplanted with tulips
 - 4 Clipped parterre with tulips
 - 5 Formal water feature
 - 6 Courtyard seating area
 - 7 House
 - 8 Courtyard and outdoor dining
 - 9 Clipped boundary hedges
 - 10 Paved pathway with clipped hedge edge
 - 11 Play structure
 - 12 Pergola with seating
- Plan drawn by Renée Davies
at Unitec's Landscape Architecture Department**

The Walkers moved out for a few months in 2004 while they undertook major renovations on the house. When they moved back in, they started on the garden.

"It was completely overgrown and there was even a glasshouse in the backyard," says Jenny. "You couldn't even see it because it was so overgrown with vines. It was quite a steeply sloping site as well. We spent hours and hours clearing it and thinking about what we wanted."

They decided to tackle the backyard first, and enlisted the help of McLean Landscapes to do the design.

"They did the original plan in 2005, though really, we probably didn't give them a big enough budget to do it properly. At the time we were trying to do it as cheaply as we could."

"So in 2006 I had a second crack at it, changed some things around and planted new things. There were originally a few natives and tropical plants, but I really wanted clipped hedges, like an English-style garden."

Barbara Garrett, who specialises in planting schemes, helped Jenny with many of her plant choices. As well as the teucrium hedging (Jenny had already planted the eugenia hedging in 2005), they also planted the fragrant, apricot-yellow Noisette rose 'Crepuscule', which climbs up the back of the house.

A vege garden went in too, and much later, to accommodate the couple's three girls (Victoria, 11, Ava, 7, and Estella, 4), a scooter path was put in.



The backyard incorporates a play area and a scooter path for the girls to burn off energy.

"The scooter path goes all around the backyard so the kids can do loops on their scooters or their trikes or rollerblades."

"That goes all around the backyard so the kids can do loops on their scooters or their trikes or rollerblades. There's even a little ramp in it, so it keeps it interesting. It goes around the patio area and then they go down the ramp onto the scooter track and back around to the patio. It's been really good."

In 2010 they started on the front lawn, with the help of landscape designer Robin Shafer and landscapers Second Nature ("They were amazing."). The garden was levelled – it originally sloped down to the road – and walls were constructed and wrought-iron fences manufactured and erected.

"Now we've got that all level as you walk in, and you have got a higher level on the left. It's totally and utterly changed our house. It's given us a whole new room. It's a suntrap. It just makes the whole house work so much better."

Once again, topiaries and hedges were planted, including port wine magnolia instant hedging from Twining Valley Nurseries. A diamond shaped, espaliered star jasmine covers a wall and small bedding plants and bulbs sit in buxus-edged beds.

"While I haven't planted them for a couple of years, I would usually

plant different tulips each year. One year I planted white tulips, one year it was black. The ones in flower when the photos were taken were red with white tips. I planted about 300."

There is also a white, scented climbing rose – the Noisette rose 'Lamarque'.

Jenny opted for Japanese buxus (*Buxus microphylla* var. *japonica*) for the low hedging instead of English buxus (*Buxus sempervirens*).

"We had to do English in the topiaries, but the Japanese is a bit more resilient to that new bug, buxus blight. Japanese buxus has a slightly shinier and rounder leaf. I actually prefer it. It has more of a deep green colour."

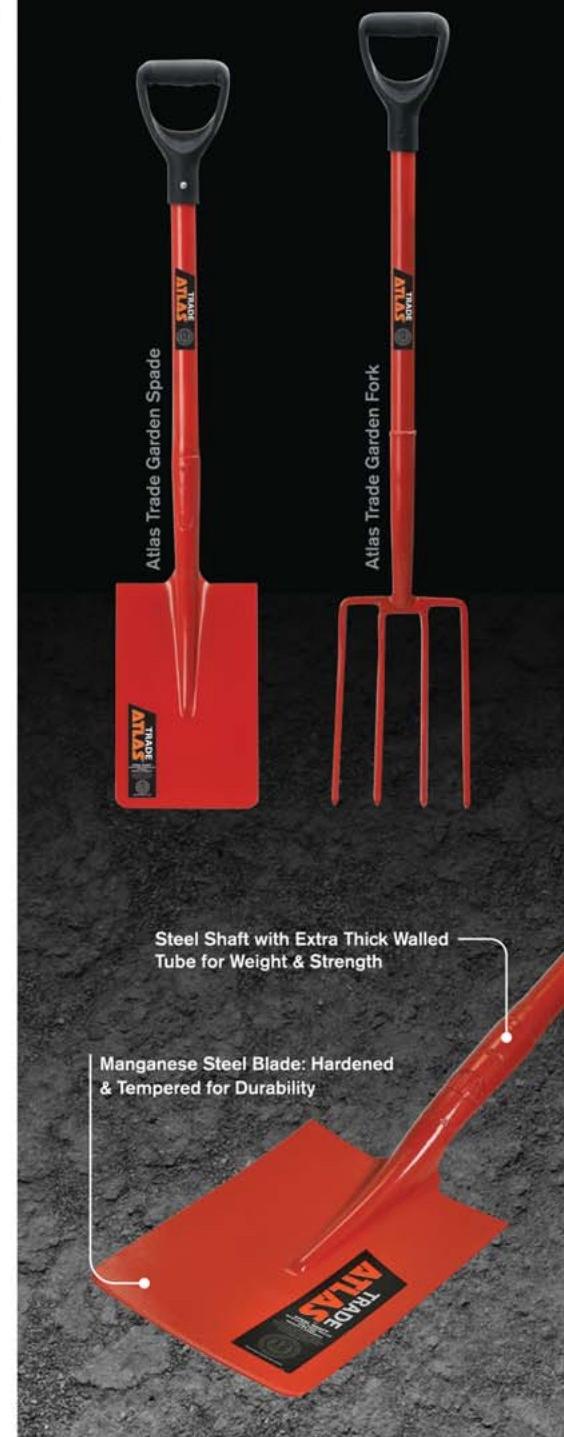
A little maintenance is needed to keep the hedging and topiaries clipped, but Jenny employs a helper who clips them once every six weeks. Jenny maintains them in between.

"I love the garden. It's very therapeutic. And I do love having the water feature on. While the road isn't too busy, there's a good amount of traffic that comes past. The water feature just brings your attention right into the yard and you don't hear all the other things going on."

"It all works very well in a small garden."

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THE GOOD LIFE



Martha Stewart

has a "gift room" just for wrapping up her pressies in. This is my version – a covered nook on one end of our shed for arranging posies, potting up herbs, hanging tools and storing vases and seeds. The vintage wall hanging is from fatherrabbit.co.nz.

25 days of Christmas

The countdown to Christmas is on! Lynda Hallinan shares her advent calendar of sowing, growing and shopping tasks for a homegrown celebration.

PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG

Christmas, quite frankly, couldn't come at a worse time for gardeners, could it? Now that the weather has finally settled and the soil temperature is just right for direct sowing, we're expected to down our dibbers and turn our attention to flinging tinsel over pine trees, making wreaths, baking fruit cakes and stuffing turkeys (and stockings).

If, like me, it's your turn to host the family festivities, you can't simply ignore the weeds while you do battle at the shopping malls either.

Sadly, as an al fresco entertaining venue my garden looks much better in mid-November than late December. A month ago it was a picture of spring glory, but summer's early gatecrashers – black spot on the roses, rust on the hollyhocks, aphids partying hard in my herb garden – are making their presence felt. But given that my campaign to reschedule Christmas is unlikely to succeed, may I present instead my festive-season checklist: 25 easy garden projects to knock off between now and Christmas Day.



December 1

Sow radishes today and – all going to plan – these perfect red baubles will be ready to pluck on Christmas Day. Our reliable favourites are 'Fireball' (McGregor's) and 'Cherry Belle' (Kings Seeds and Yates). Keep the soil moist.



December 2

Pot up mint for lots of lush leaves to boil with your new potatoes or serve in Christmas cocktails. Keep mint well watered to reduce the risk that Santa delivers rust for Christmas. Cut mint back hard to stop those orange spots.

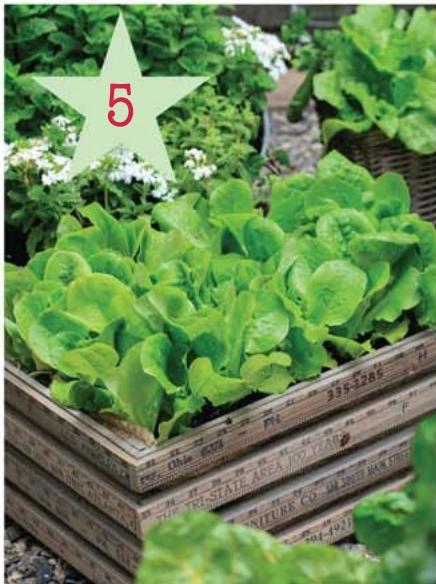


December 3

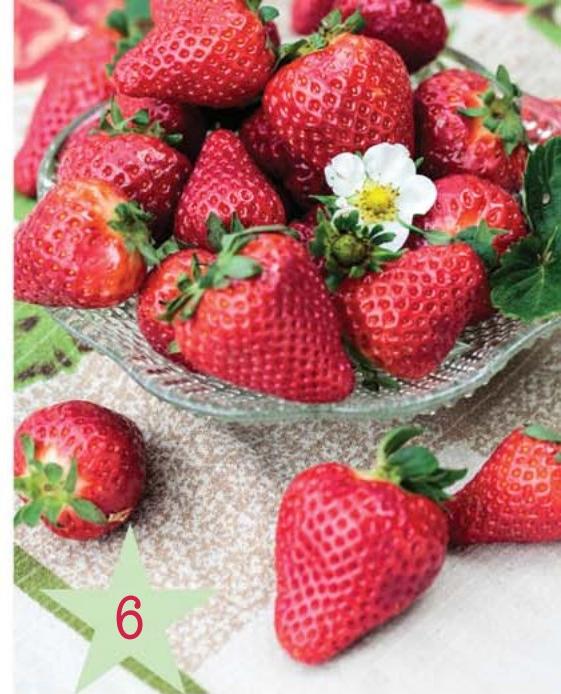
Plant tubs of potted colour to brighten up your outdoor-entertaining areas. Do it today and they'll have filled out nicely by Christmas Day. Plant red verbenas (pictured) and petunias with white dianthus, alyssum and cosmos.



4



5



6



7

Giving Christmas
a homegrown flavour
is as simple as
picking a handful of
herbs for the turkey
stuffing - or plopping
fat, red, sun-ripened
strawberries into
flutes of Champagne.



8



9



10



11

★ December 4

Taste test your tipple. If you bottled 'Damson' gin last summer, check the flavour and sweeten if required. Plus it's not too late to whip up strawberry vodka or apricot liqueur (or see our cherry brandy recipe on page 34). Pack sliced strawberries into a large jar, top with vodka, steep for a week, then strain. Or pack dried apricots into 500ml jars, sprinkle with ½ cup sugar and top with brandy. Store in a dark cupboard, shaking daily. Eat after 6-8 weeks.

★ December 5

Pot up lettuces for a portable supply of summer salad greens. Try 'Canasta', 'Buttercrunch' and 'Cos' – they don't mind the heat, unlike the crisp-head varieties.

★ December 6

Check bird netting for holes. Don't let an opportunistic blackbird beat you to all your strawberries or early boysenberries. Lay fresh mulch, such as pea straw or fine bark, to keep the berries clean and rot-free. And if you're worried your berries won't ripen in time to decorate your Christmas pav, cover the soil around the plants with strips of black polythene for extra warmth.

★ December 7

Keen fisherman in the family? Pot up fish-friendly herbs such as dill (pictured) and chervil to take to the beach. For fast growth, feed weekly with liquid fertiliser.

★ December 8

Buy bags of limes. My young lime tree just can't keep up with our demand for cocktails – and I baulk at paying \$39.99/kg to buy limes over summer. So stock up now as limes (and lemons) can be frozen whole, then simply thawed for juice or zest.

★ December 9

Deadhead your flower beds. The more annual flowers you pick, the more buds the plants produce. I keep my festive floral arrangements simple, cramming casual cottage flowers such as sweet William, orlaya, candytuft, gypsophila and carnations into vintage glass milk bottles.

★ December 10

Lack floristry skills? I love these metal flower-arranging lids that screw onto old Ball jars. Order from vintagelove.co.nz or make your own by cutting out a circle of chicken wire and bending it over any jar.

★ December 11

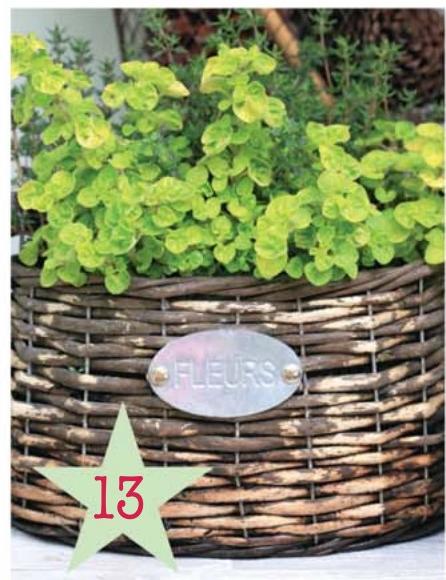
Plant sage for your Christmas stuffing. I don't mind going the extra mile with a fancy festive stuffing. This is my current favourite stuffing recipe from *Cuisine* food editor Ray McVinnie. I use purple sage, because that's what I grow. In a frying pan, heat 4 tablespoons of olive oil and gently fry 2 finely chopped onions, 4 chopped garlic cloves and 12 chopped fresh sage leaves for about 10 minutes, or until the onions are soft. Take off heat and, when cool, combine with the zest of 1 lemon, ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, ½ teaspoon sea salt, 400g pork sausages, sliced 2cm thick, 1½ cups of small cubes of sourdough bread and 150ml plain unsweetened yoghurt. Stir gently to mix.



12

★ December 12

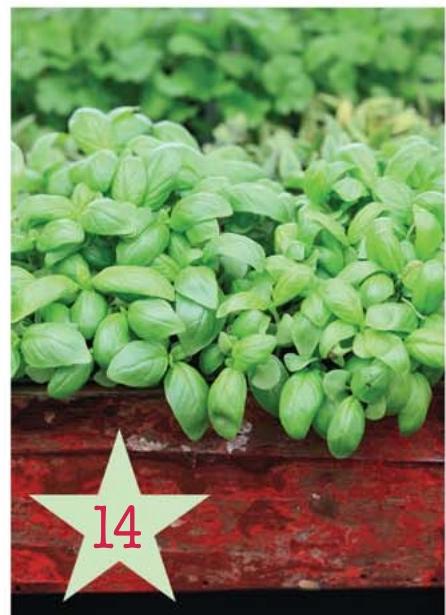
Pick runner beans daily to keep them producing tender pods, as no one likes tough, stringy beans. Keep sowing dwarf beans too. These prolific croppers tend to produce one massive flush 6-8 weeks after sowing, followed by intermittent pods for several weeks afterwards. If you want heaps of beans all summer long, it's better to sow a second (and third) crop.



13

★ December 13

Serving roast spuds on Christmas Day? Instead of roasting with rosemary, toss with a generous handful of roughly chopped golden marjoram. Or infuse sprigs of this underrated and pretty herb in olive oil for salad dressings and barbecue marinades.



14

★ December 14

Gently nip off the tips (rather than cutting the stalks with scissors) of sweet basil just above a pair of strong buds to encourage lush, leafy, bushy growth for pesto making. Always keep potted basil well watered, as if it gets heat stressed it's more likely to bolt to seed prematurely.



★ December 15

How embarrassing it is when friends arrive bearing homemade gifts and you have nothing on hand to offer in return. Beat them to the punch by making fabric hats and crafty labels for homemade jams, chutneys and bottled fruit. Decorate those jars now – trust me, you'll be too busy later!

★ December 16

Forage for firewood and pine cones for braziers and charcoal barbecues, as early summer is never as balmy as we'd like.

★ December 17

Bandicoot for 'Jersey Bennies'. How do you know when your spuds are ready? The easiest way to find out is to sneakily tickle the soil around the plants to feel for tubers. Don't wait for 'Liseta', 'Rocket' and 'Swift' to start flowering first, as most earlies are notoriously shy to flower.

★ December 18

Seven sleeps to go! Buy a tree and start decorating it (do this any sooner and you'll be vacuuming up fallen pine needles long before you start unwrapping your gifts). Hang fairy lights, thread popcorn onto string for eco-friendly tinsel and fill vases with red flowers to get into the festive spirit. Luckily for me, my bed of perennial *Achillea 'Red Velvet'* provides endless stems for picking, and these last up to a fortnight in the vase. They can also be dried for an everlasting display. *Achillea 'Red Velvet'* is available by mail order from Marshwood Gardens in Invercargill.

★ December 19

Raid op shops for floral jugs and vases. Fill with homegrown flowers and give to colleagues who don't have gardens.

★ December 20

Terrariums make trendy gifts.

Use any large, clear glass jar with a lid for a "closed" self-sustaining ecosystem that only requires the occasional spray of mist. Start with a layer of sand, add a layer of potting mix, then add rocks, mosses and tiny houseplants such as maidenhair ferns.

★ December 21

Pump the water on hearting lettuces to stop them tasting bitter. They also prefer a little afternoon shade. If your lettuces have developed a sour attitude, pick them the night before Christmas and soak (roots and all) in a bucket of water overnight.

★ December 22

Stuck for a last-minute gift idea?

Tie a ribbon around a collection of your favourite seed varieties and give the gift that keeps on growing! Choose a theme – wild flowers and bee-friendly annuals for nature lovers, herbs for foodie friends, cottage flowers for DIY florists – and write your own growing tips in the card. My top 10 summer seeds to sow would include: a packet of mixed microgreens to sprinkle in a tub, rocket, colourful 'Rainbow Blend' carrots (Kings Seeds), 'Iznik Mini' snack cucumbers (Egmont Seeds), 'Dwarf Royal Burgundy' beans (McGregor's), 'Greek Mini' basil (Kings Seeds), 'Petite Bouquet' sunflowers (Kings Seeds), 'Zephyr' zucchini (Kings Seeds), Dr Keith Hammett's 'Blue Reflections' sweet peas (Yates) and mini 'Golden Nugget' bush pumpkins (Yates).

★ December 23

Take your eggs out of the fridge

now in preparation for making pavlova. And if you're wondering what to do with all those leftover yolks... make traditional eggnog! In a small pot over a medium heat, gently heat 1 cup of milk and ¼ cup of sugar. In a separate bowl, whisk 3 egg yolks, then slowly pour in the warm milk, whisking constantly. Return to the pot and gently heat (do not allow to boil), stirring constantly, until the eggnog thickens just enough to coat the back of a spoon. Take off the heat, add 2 tablespoons bourbon and ¼ cup cream and top with grated nutmeg. Serve warm or chilled.

★ December 24

'Twas the night before Christmas...

Time to wrap gifts, sing carols, make trifle – and make a note in your 2015 *Garden Diary* (order now from mags4gifts.co.nz) to plant a 'Blackboy' peach tree. Syrupy, bottled 'Blackboy' peaches are the secret ingredient in my Christmas trifle.



18

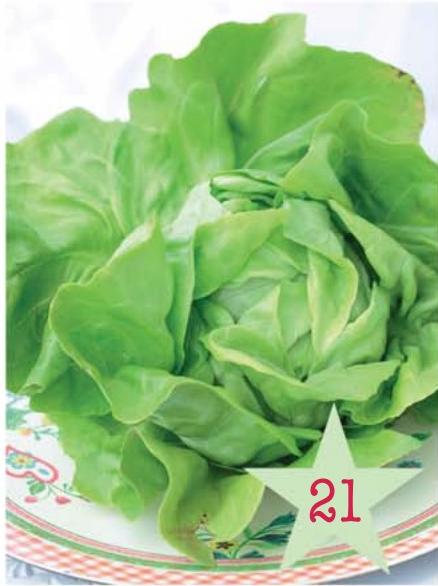


19



20

Our family never once paid for a perfect, pyramidal pine tree. We'd go "foraging" for self-sown forestry block escapees, which was why our Christmas trees were always lopsided!



21



22



23



24

December 25

Merry Christmas! The proof of the pudding is in the eating – or at least it will be if I can somehow stop my kids, Lachlan (left) and Lucas, scoffing all our fresh strawberries before I've finished decorating the pavlova.





TOP & FLOP CROPS



'SUGARSNAP' PEAS:

Previously, my definition of a top crop of peas was picking enough pods on any given day to fill a colander (and thus, once shelled, to fill a small pot). But like the *Oxford English Dictionary*, I'm not adverse to revising my definitions of success. Indeed, my attitude to growing fresh peas has now reached "high doh" (officially sanctioned in this year's update of the *Oxford English Dictionary* to mean "a state of extreme agitation or nervous excitement"). That's because my children have finally started eating them! For three years I've been trying to convince Lucas that peas are actually green lollies – and my efforts have finally paid off. I can't pick them fast enough to keep up with their demands for "more peas, please".



SOUR CHERRIES: Perhaps this is tempting fate, but as I write this my five-year-old 'Griotella' sour cherry trees are laden with tart green fruit. Last year birds got the lot. How will I fare this year? I'll report back next month.



FLORENCE FENNEL: I've grown a cracker crop of fat fennel this season, which presents quite the culinary quandary. Aside from eating fennel raw in salads or baked in a gratin of cream and Parmesan, I don't know how else to eat it! Jamie Oliver suggests a salad of fennel and lemon (shred both whole) with coriander, flat-leaf parsley and mint, but I'm game to hear of any other recipe ideas. Email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz.



SWISS CHARD:

All my ruby chard (above) has run to seed, which doesn't bother me in the least, as it looks so dramatic as it heads for the sky. What bothers me is that, just as it reached its statuesque peak, most of it blew over in the wind. My 2m-tall *Angelica archangelica* also toppled over in gusty wind. Such a shame, for me and the bees.



BEANS & BEETROOT: My first direct sowing of dwarf beans was uprooted by birds, so I sowed a second batch in seed trays, only for the tender leaves to be brutally pecked off post-transplanting. Damn birds also had a go at my germinating beetroot and my transplanted beetroot seedlings. This has been my worst season ever for bird damage and, short of flinging netting over everything, there's little I can do.

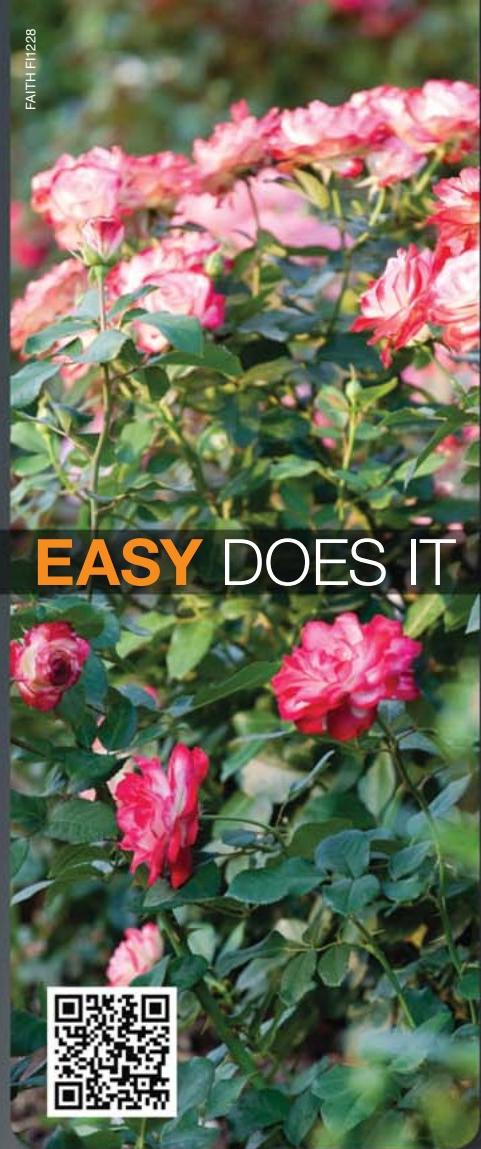


PLUMS: Looks like I won't be too busy bottling plums over the Christmas holidays. The miserable spring weather – it rained almost every day that my plum orchard was in blossom – has resulted in a poor fruit set. There's barely any fruit on my 'Elephant Heart'.



QUINCES: I don't use sprays in my orchard (not even copper), but the price I pay for that policy is an ugly leaf blight on my quince trees. Their lovely spring foliage already looks ugly and pockmarked. I vowed to chop them down if the blight came back this year, but I've given them a reprieve, as they are laden with fruit for the first time. ♡

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IN SEASON

Vintage Class

*Good looks, charm, a certain
je ne sais quoi – there's a reason why
some plants never lose their appeal.*

*Neil Ross shares his old favourites
and pinpoints the qualities which
make a plant a classic*



PHOTOS: CHRIS CHEADLE/GETTYIMAGES; NEIL ROSS

Hollyhocks

Nothing beats hollyhocks (*Alcea rosea*) for boldness in summer, with colours ranging from lemon, pink, red and black. Being biennials or short-lived perennials, they flower in their second year from a summer sowing. Hollyhocks like plenty of sun and ventilation and support themselves best when growing in confined, stony places on well-fed soil. Protect them from rust by spraying.

Perhaps I'll march on the town hall with placards promoting my lost favourites: "Rights For Snapdragons" and "Bring Back Begonias".

Throwing a party nearly always involves inviting round a group of your oldest friends. You might be polite and include a few work colleagues; the neighbour perhaps (so you can turn the music up late); and even a scattering of relations to avoid Family World War Three, but in the end it is the mates you have chosen to see again and again over the years with whom you really feel the most relaxed. And when I walk around my garden, it's not so much the experimental and trendy plants that give me lasting pleasure, but my old friends who have stood the test of time, who I couldn't be without and which turn on the charm year on year. After a cold winter, nothing beats the fresh-faced eagerness of pale lemon primroses popping up on bare soil, for example. I'd plump for these over any inflated and overbred polyanthus any day.

In the rush for the flash-in-the-pan new releases it's easy to forget the virtues of the old timers. Take hollyhocks (*Alcea*), for example. They reek of classic country charm and appear bold as brass in high summer, head and shoulders above everything else, but do we see them decorating front gardens and those awkward, dry beds under the eaves of houses where they would thrive? Hardly ever. Yes, they do get rust on their leaves, but these plants are replete with nostalgic charm, even if you don't possess a thatched cottage with a little paling fence on which they can drunkenly lean.

Rows of sunflowers have a similar effect on me, their bloated exuberance always redolent of the vast fields of the things, enjoyed on long drives across Europe as a child. Old classics like these seem to have super-strong shapes, which have imprinted themselves on my mind – maybe that's the secret of their staying power?

In spring, old charm comes easy with the ruffles of a peony, the papery bowls



Phlox

With its musky, spicy scent, phlox is a summer staple for me. *Phlox paniculata* 'Argosy' (above) is a beautiful, gentle colour – lilac purples swirling around a white centre. With a rich, free-draining soil and plenty of water they will perform for a good month. Phlox are easy to divide and spread in autumn, don't need staking and will cope with deep shade. Available from Nikau Hill (nikauhill.co.nz).



Angel's fishing rod

Dierama pulcherrimum is an evergreen, clumping perennial from the iris family. Although they don't flower for long, the shimmering, papery bells on fine wands are stunning. The true species is bright magenta, but you will sometimes find pink, white and an inky purple cultivar called 'Blackbird'. Dieramas like a sunny, open position and a well-drained but moist soil. They grow readily from seed and will grow in cracks in paving and border edges, but oddly the plants sulk if you divide them.



Astilbe

Candyfloss on a stick, astilbes are ferny-looking plants ideal for damp hollows. Though they flower briefly, they are well-behaved plants that look good at every stage of growth, and are easily divided in spring to make the drifts in which they look most natural. They associate well with irises, hostas and ferns and come in a range of sizes (10–100cm) and colours, from white to reds and purples. 'Hyacinth' is a lovely lilac-pink variety that is available from Parva Plants (parvaplants.co.nz).



Liatris spicata

Known as gayfeather in its native America, *Liatris spicata*'s dense 30cm flower spikes unusually flower from the top rather than the bottom. Birds and bees love the blooms as well as the winter seed heads. It's an easy perennial to split up in spring – it just needs a good dose of sunshine – and will tolerate drought. The flowers are ideal in a vase and keep their colour well when dried. 'Floristan Violet' (above) is available from Marshwood Gardens (marshwoodgardens.co.nz).

Astrantia

A classic that thrives in cold areas with heavy, moist soils, astrantia (or masterwort) is long flowering, easy to grow and has a unique flower structure, earning it the nickname "Hattie's pincushion". It seeds readily, but new, sterile cultivars in pink, red and white are also available. 'Ruby Cloud' readily self-seeds. Cut it back after the first flush of flowers for a repeat flowering. Available from Marshwood Gardens (marshwoodgardens.co.nz).





Spiraea japonica

Spiraeas are easy to grow, and flower from late spring to midsummer. Many gardens have the white spring version, known as bridal wreath, or the newer gold-leaved dwarf versions. 'Anthony Waterer' (left) is a classy wine pink, perfect with roses, phlox and penstemons. Prune off the dead heads and thin the bush with secateurs after flowering to allow time for new growth.

of crêpe petals of giant perennial poppies, and the spires of lupins or azure delphiniums, which for me sum up the tipping point into summer. However, these are replaced in high summer with equally crisp and distinct shapes. Where would a garden be without at least a few flat heads of yarrow (*Achillea*), for example, whether it's one of the older varieties such as 'Gold Plate' or the more recent cultivars in trendy shades of copper and fiery red. Contrast these with equally vibrant spires of a red-hot poker (*Kniphofia*) and you have the sparks of a classic coupling.

For some plants, disease problems are the reason they fall from favour, but busy breeders often overcome such problems and sometimes we might have failed to catch up. Bergamot (*Monarda*) is a good example. These plants are a magnet for bees and have a unique crown-like flower shape, but susceptibility to mildew once made them problematic. Newer cultivars however, such as 'Mahogany' or the range named after signs of the zodiac, are much healthier and will grow in surprisingly dry soil once established. Other plants might have fallen from favour because of their sheer enthusiasm. You will have to contain plants like Japanese anemones and soapwort (*Saponaria*), with strongly questing rhizomes. Put them between a concrete path and a house wall, however, and they will flower for months on end, no fuss.

Quite a few summer staples enjoy a place in the garden with a bit more moisture than normal. I'd include here bog-garden legends like lacy astilbes, which don't flower for long but have such beautiful foliage and winter seed heads that a garden would just not be the same without them.

Ligularias also give you flowers and foliage in equal measure, but you will have to protect them from slugs and snails. I was well impressed last year with the entire tribe of loosestrifes (*Lythrum*). These have become weeds in some parts of the country, but most garden varieties are sterile. Astrantias are similar and have recently shown signs of becoming favourites again, with sterile varieties available in burgundies and pink, but you need a cold climate and a moist soil for them to look their best.

Other classic garden plants have fallen from popularity for no obvious reason other than familiarity breeding contempt. Perhaps I'll march on the town hall with placards promoting my lost favourites: "Rights For Snapdragons" and "Bring Back Begonias!", "Don't Mock Mock Orange" and "Love a Lupin". When did you last see a scabious or the pert little plumes of

a gayfeather – the lovely, everlasting *Liatris* from the American prairies?

Sometimes, in our search for excitement, we need to take our foot off the throttle and throw the car into reverse. The classics didn't become so for no reason. Like the little black dress they will always be there, ready to wear and easy on the eye. 



Anthemis tinctoria

Few garden plants flower for longer than this cheerful daisy, which is a lovely mingler with pink and purple roses or the lilac flowers of perennial wallflower 'Bowles' Mauve'. 'E. C. Buxton' (pictured) has a compact base of green, ferny leaves. Once the first flush of flowers has faded in midsummer, trim off the heads with shears and you will get a sizeable second flush. Other varieties include paler 'Sauce Hollandaise', but 'E. C. Buxton' is the best performer if given light soil and a sunny situation.



Red hot pokers

Kniphofias are much more refined these days. Breeders look for finer leaves, smaller clumps and repeat flowering. Now you can combine single colours, from brick red to soft fawn and apricot, and mingle them with daylilies. Keep deadheading and give them a sandy, well-watered soil. Pictured is *Kniphofia 'Buttercup'* but Parva Plants (parvaplants.co.nz) has a great range, including softer lemon 'Pineapple Popsicle' and the more substantial 'Green Jade'.

PLANT PROFILE



TALK TO YOUR PLANTS

Xanthe White goes bush to talk romance with one of our native mistletoes, *Ileostylus micranthus*

PORTRAIT: EMMA BASS

Q It's not something that I've ever said out loud, but I've always had this thing for mistletoe as it appears in books and movies. I imagined that one day I was destined to be beneath a sprig, completely unaware... our eyes would meet... The rest needs little explanation. Now, though, as a happily married woman, I realise all those years I was looking for the wrong mistletoe. While European mistletoe is picked and hung inside as the snow falls outside, here in New Zealand our mistletoes are rare, summer-flowering plants you find growing on trees in beech forests or in lowland forest or scrub. So all I needed to do was lead my husband up a bush-clad path and steal a kiss against a mossy beech trunk.

A You know, if that's what it took for more people to notice us, I'd happily be the catalyst for summer romance. The last centuries have been increasingly difficult for all of us native mistletoes. It relates to our role in the forest. Traditionally, mistletoes are an important stimulus in an ecological system. Not only do we attract birds and insects for fruit and nectar, we offer nesting points for many birds. This not only supports the birds but increases the seed dispersal around us. Though small, we revitalise. Our seeds are sticky, and after eating the berries, birds wipe their beaks on the branches of the trees to clean up, or they excrete our seeds in their droppings. The birds shift us through the forest this way. Unfortunately, we are just as attractive to mammals, such as possums, as we are to the birds, but we've not developed a growth system that can perform at a pace that can handle this intensity of grazing. We need protection.

Q Yes, you do. I've long been aware of the metal rings that DoC has been using to keep possums out of trees where mistletoe is present, but I guess trapping and other methods of pest control are also really important to you.

A If our forests are to be protected, pest control really is needed.



Q But you are actually a parasite are you not? You live off other mature trees by tapping into their vascular systems to remove nutrients and water. Are you even capable of photosynthesis?

A Technically, we are not parasitic; we're hemiparasitic, as we do have a small capacity to sustain ourselves by photosynthesis. But sure we're dependent on sharing a vascular system with a larger tree – that's how forests work. We all have a role to play, and while our growth may cause an old tree to lose a limb or two, young saplings do better where we grow because we support the birds. It's an important process.

Q Am I right that there are nine species of mistletoe native to New Zealand?

A Yes, that's right, though we believe *Trilepidea adamsii* is extinct, as it has not been seen since 1954. I'm a green-flowered mistletoe and unlike the three species of beech mistletoe, which have red, yellow or scarlet flowers, we can grow on over 27 species, including exotics. *Pseudopanax* and *pittosporum* are common hosts for us. This does make us adaptable but not immune to the same threats as our cousins.

Q What can you tell me about your interactions with human populations? Where do you fit in our social history?

A Maori appreciated our sweet berries, which were eaten raw. Our given names were *pirinoa*, *pikirangi*, *pikiraki*, *tunuku*, *karetai* and *pirita*. *Piri* means sticky.

As garden plants, we're hard to propagate because we don't grow in soil. So you won't find us at the local garden centre despite some of us being quite stunning in flower. But we're becoming more dependent on gardeners and conservationists protecting us. It helps if we are recognised and reported so that DoC can monitor how we are doing. The best any gardener can do is be observant. Perhaps the best catalyst for this could be the summer romance. It's never too late to lead your husband up a bush-lined path after all! ☺

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Ring of Roses

DECK THE HALLS WITH THIS SWEET SUMMER WREATH

FORGET THE HOLLY AND THE IVY. You can make your own Christmas wreath with whatever flowers and foliage you have in your garden. We've even added a few berries for a pop of festive colour.

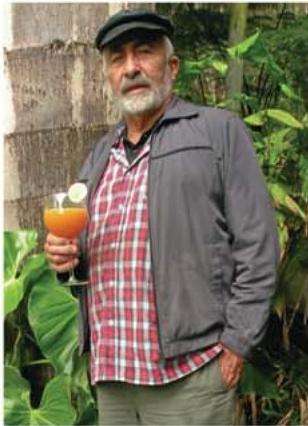
TO CREATE THIS FLORAL WREATH, begin by standing your flowers in water for a few hours to increase their longevity. Next, submerge the foam wreath in water

until saturated. If you're planning to hang your wreath, secure floral wire around it before inserting the flowers. Next, insert your plants, starting with stems of foliage, then your flowers and berries – we've used roses, chamomile, borage, thyme and raspberries – slightly varying the stems' angles as you go. Refresh your wreath daily by placing it in a shallow container of cool water and replacing any withered plants.

SUMMER WREATH INGREDIENTS

- FLORAL FOAM WREATH (AVAILABLE FROM FLORISTS AND SOME GARDEN CENTRES)
- FLORIST'S WIRE
- ROSES
- CHAMOMILE FLOWERS
- BORAGE FLOWERS
- THYME
- RASPBERRIES (OR BERRIES OF YOUR CHOICE – IF YOU'VE ANY TO SPARE!)
- FOLIAGE

FROM NORTH TO SOUTH



72 NORTHLAND

Our garden gurus
from around the
country relay merry
summer tales
of their gardens

in December



74 AUCKLAND



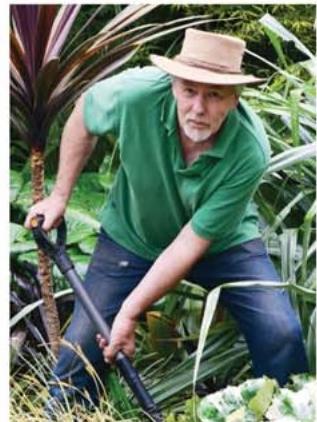
75 WAIKATO



76 HAWKE'S BAY



77 TARANAKI



78 KAPITI COAST



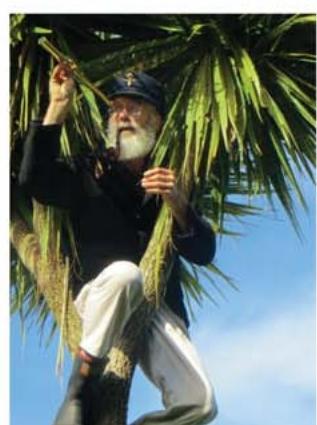
80 NELSON



82 AKAROA



84 DUNEDIN



85 SOUTHLAND

Northland
RUSSELL
FRANSHAM
SUBTROPICALS

White dwarf
bougainvillea.

Social climbers

BOUGAINVILLEA IS A BEAST OF A PLANT. IT'S A THORNY, RAMPANT, SPRAWLING BULLY OF A BUSH WITH AMBITIONS TO BE A VINE. AND LIKE MOST BULLIES IT DOESN'T CLING DAINTILY TO ITS NEIGHBOUR

It leans on them. Then in case you don't get the message, it rips your clothes and skin. Nice. But despite all this, they are undeniably gorgeous. With such a spectacular display of vivid colour, they are a plant whose presence can transform a garden into an oasis of tropical glamour.

In neglected Northland gardens you sometimes see bougainvilleas as huge tangles of thick, spiky stems,

with few flowers. Our climate is wetter and cooler than bougainvilleas' rocky, arid South American homelands, so their root systems get huge and they grow lusher and flower less in our richer, moister soils.

Don't tell Amnesty International, but when it comes to the garden a little torture can work wonders.

The secret to growing bougainvilleas in New Zealand is to choose a dry, sunny spot with soil that is a bit stony or hard, with minimal nutrients so that the plant's growth is restrained, which in turn stimulates heavier flowering. The stress seems to trigger a physiological panic to reproduce.

Bougainvillea will also flower more continuously if they are fed regularly through summer with a high potash, very low-nitrogen fertiliser, which will effectively suppress vigorous growth.

Don't cut bougainvillea back hard because you'll create a monster.

As anyone with a rampant bougainvillea will know, this stops it flowering and stimulates vigorous thorny growth without flowers. You'd be better to remove it altogether and start again.

I'm a slow learner. It took me a long time to work out what every tropical gardener discovered ages ago:

bougainvilleas are the perfect container plant. In a big pot their roots are restrained, warm and dry(ish) and they become a bush, not a vine, and flower for much longer. Grown in tubs in full sun on the patio or in hanging baskets they need to be fed little and often with rose fertiliser throughout the warm weather. Maintain them in the desired shape by regularly shortening any longer shoots to about 20cm to keep them compact.



'Scarlett O'Hara'



Dwarf 'Siggi'



'Hawaiian Orange' with mutation.



'Mary Palmer'

Bougainvillea is named for Admiral Louis Antoine de Bougainville, French explorer, soldier and friend of Napoleon, who was the first French sea captain to cross the Pacific Ocean in about 1768. He brought the first bougainvillea plants from Brazil back to Europe where they created a sensation in the conservatories of the aristocracy.

After centuries of hybridising, there are now hundreds of varieties and many new dwarf, bushy types for small gardens. Nowadays the colour range includes delicate pastel shades and strong orange, red, magenta, purple and white bracts. There are even some that produce different-coloured bracts on the same plant, such as 'Hawaiian Orange', which randomly mutates to produce bright red flowering branches and 'Mary Palmer', which has magenta and white bracts.

Bougainvillea flower colour is more intense in our cooler climate than in the same varieties in the tropics.

This interesting quirk is confirmed by growing 'Scarlett O'Hara' in the hothouse here, where its bracts are pinkish rather than red.

You can propagate bougainvillea by taking cuttings of last autumn's growth in spring or early summer.

Keep them slightly damp and warm in coarse sand in a shady spot. They take a couple of months to make roots, so they need to be misted with a fungicide every couple of weeks till the roots appear.

Bougainvilleas respond very stylishly to hardship – they bloom loud.

Loud and proud. A little stress now and then is character building, so treat 'em mean and keep 'em keen. ♣

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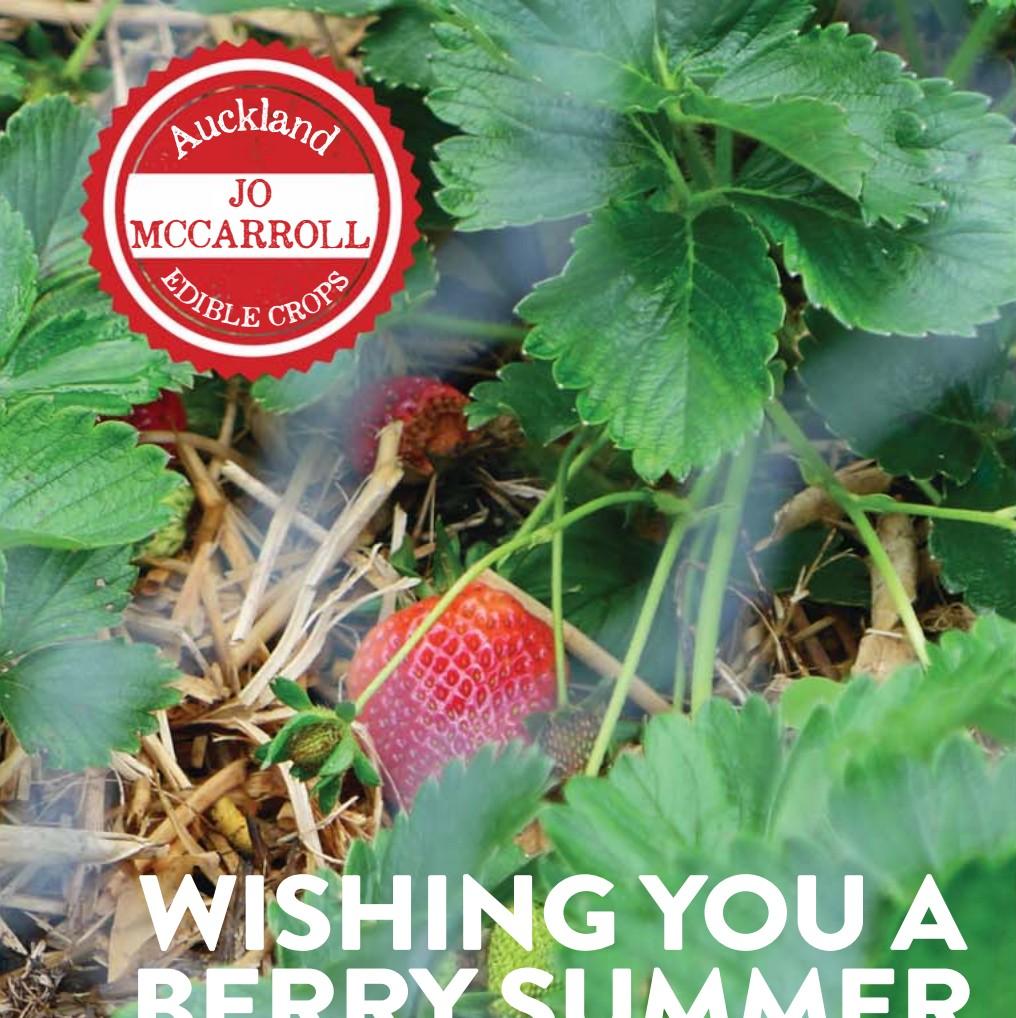
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WISHING YOU A BERRY SUMMER

LAST CHRISTMAS I GAVE A JAR OF STRAWBERRY BALSAMIC BLACK PEPPER JAM TO EVERYONE (IT'S MUCH NICER THAN IT SOUNDS). I LIKE TO GIVE A LITTLE SOMETHING HOMEMADE OVER THE FESTIVE SEASON.

Homemade but not, in this instance, homegrown. I never grow enough berries to have some spare for making jam – to be honest I can barely cover a pav! Last year's festive preserve was made with berries I bought from Avondale's Sunday morning markets (oh, the shame). The fault is mine. I've had a lackadaisical attitude to mulching around my plants (and berries in direct contact with the ground will rot). If you haven't already, cover the ground around your strawbs with newspaper, sawdust, bark – really any loose mulch will do. I like pea straw, partly because as it breaks down it helps aerate my heavy soil, but mainly because I think it looks pretty. I can't grow gooseberries and currants in my Auckland city garden (they need winter chill) but if you can, apply mulch to them too – they like a cool root run.

I've been pretty lazy about netting my berries in past years too.

With a consequence that birds have come in flocks to scoff my paltry harvest. As soon as the berries are ripe they seem to know. I'm not sure how... maybe they see it on Twitter? It's all changed this year though, since Dad built me an excellent strawberry-patch cover for my birthday. The birds won't get near the berries this year. To be honest, I can hardly get to them myself. It's a two-person job to shift the anti-bird cage!

Northern and southern highbush blueberries are ripe this month.

So protect them from birds too. In fact 'Island Blue' fruits as early as October. I'd better plant one. I saw blueberries for sale in November for \$12 a punnet. That's nearly enough for half a plant, so I should be breaking even pretty soon.



Show berries some love while they are in full production. Keep up water and give them a feed. But remember, blueberries don't like fertiliser that's high in nitrogen, such as Nitrophoska or Novatec. I heard of a grower who applied such a fertiliser to blueberries in pots and the plants were dead in days. Instead, give them a small does of citrus fertiliser in spring when growth starts.

Finally, summer-fruiting raspberries should start producing this month.

I love raspberries but never thought it was worth bothering with them in Auckland. But Incredible Edibles' Fiona Boylan told me if you can grow apples, you can grow raspberries – she says 'Aspiring', 'Ivory', 'Ebony' and 'Waiau' will all fruit in warmer places (although the dual-cropping varieties won't crop well twice without winter chill). ♣

MULCH OBLIGED

THE YEAR WE PLANTED OUR ORCHARD THERE WAS A DROUGHT AND WE HAD NO WATER SUPPLY. THE ANSWER WAS MAJOR MULCH

Old underfelt donated by a new neighbour was a godsend. It cut into beautiful, tidy rectangles and encircled each trunk with symmetrical, weed-suppressing practicality.

The underfelt was an old, woven-wool type, and within a year it rotted away to worm food. I sourced some more, but this lot I am still regretting six years later. It had a plastic weave that no spade can cut and now acts as an impenetrable anchor for all the weeds that have grown through it. From now on my garden gets only the best New Zealand wool.

So I looked for natural mulches.

I wanted mulch that would suppress spring weeds, mulch that would retain moisture in summer, mulch that would feed the autumn crop, mulch that would enhance my soil biology and mulch that wouldn't be polluting my garden two years later.

I networked. I cultivated old friends, customers, new neighbours, new neighbours' exes and total strangers.

Goat poo was magic stuff.

The farmer had piles of it and loaded it on for me with his tractor. The ute and trailer slugged home so overloaded, hubby told me off. But the trees loved it. And the pumpkins that year were amazing.

Chicken poo was also amazing, but a bit harder to extract.

A farmers' market contact (commercial chicken farmers haven't been as obliging) considered cleaning out his sheds hard work. He was right. It was hard, stinky work with wheelbarrows, up and over ramps and rotten eggs. But the trees thrived!



I've learnt that there's a lot of free mulch around.

Sheep poo had the same drawbacks.

On my hands and knees under a woolshed is not my idea of fun. And though the trees were happy, it also brought a lot of clover seed that I am still trying to eradicate.

In nearby Matamata, horse-training establishments kindly leave sacks of stable sweepings by the roadside.

At first I thought that these free bags of nitrogen-rich shavings and digested grass were marvellous. But in spring you almost have to line up at the gate for them, and in summer they come with millions of eggs that hatch into tiny, black, buzzy flies. I discovered this three days after mulching the vege garden at the back door!

I also learnt a lesson with calf bedding. The woodchip seasoned with calf wees and poos was delivered by a generous neighbour with a silage feeder that spat it out directly onto the orangery. But the citrus didn't grow. It wasn't until a chance remark two years later that I realised the calf sheds were disinfected with a spray that kills a huge range of bacteria, viruses

and fungi – and which was playing havoc with my soil biology. It took four years before a worm would eat that stuff.

Need mulch? Offer to clean up friends' green waste or farmers' hay sheds.

I get trailer loads in October or November when the shed is empty of all but a few mouldy bales and droppings. Spoilt silage, too mouldy for food, is also perfect mulch. I also relieve any arborist on the side of the road of their mulch and save them the cost of dumping it. A dozen beer ensures they call me next time.

Not everything free is good. Screening possible mulches for unwanted plastics, weeds, seeds and poisons is important. You also need to ensure that woodchip breaks down before you apply it, as fresh sawdust can suck nitrogen from soil.

However, if you ask and are prepared to go and get it, dig it out and rake it up, there's a lot of free mulch around. And now I don't need to mulch my established trees annually and can repay those people with fresh, organic fruit. ♣



Clockwise from top left:
One of my bees on a
borage flower; harvesting
honey out of a top-bar
beehive; honeycomb;
jars of December honey.

HI HONEY!

RIGHT NOW EVERY HIVE SMELLS LIKE A GIANT, WARM JAR OF HONEY! IF THE BEES HAVE EXCESS TO SHARE, HOPEFULLY THEY WILL GIFT ME SOME

While I am happily drinking a flat white at the local Black Barn Market on a Saturday, my bees are busy buzzing frantically from flower to hive, making honey to store to feed their babies and see them through winter.

December is known as a great month for the “flow”. This is a beekeeping term describing the time when plants are producing copious amounts of nectar to attract the busy bees to their flower nectaries and help pollinate them. During this time the honey bees can visit up to 40 flowers per minute on a warm, sunny day.

For each of my 500g honey jars, the bees have had to visit at least 2 million flowers, gathering nectar, and have flown a total of twice around the equator in their mission to do this. A single worker bee only makes 2mls of honey in her short summer life of around six weeks. I wear a glass vial with this much honey inside as a necklace to constantly remind me and explain to others how precious this gift is from these hard workers.

Local, raw honey is like fine wine, reflecting the terroir of the area.

I have around 15 top-bar hives dotted across Havelock North: in friends' gardens, on a local restaurant's balcony and in vineyards. It never ceases to amaze me how unique and different each of the honeys is from each hive, even though they are relatively close together.

My honey ranges from a light, almost luminous gold colour to a dark red colour. It all depends on what the honey bees have discovered in their neighbourhood as a good nectar source.

Bees do a waggle dance to let other worker bees in the hive know that they've found a good nectar source.

All the bees will then depart for this one source and work it frantically until all the nectar is exhausted. This is what makes honey bees the best pollinators in the world; because they focus on one nectar source at a time, they spread that specific pollen around that one species, which is what the plant needs to pollinate its fruit.



I harvest the excess honey by cutting off the filled natural honeycomb and letting it fall into a bucket. I quickly cover it with a towel and take it inside. Closing the windows and doors is very important as the bees will quickly smell the honey and try and get it back.

I use a very low-tech and ancient method to harvest my honey. It produces the best natural raw honey as there is no heating or ultra-filtration involved. Industrialised methods may stop the honey from granulating, but they actually remove all the unique local pollen particles and natural vitamins and enzymes and other nutritional elements which make each jar of honey so unique.

I place my honey into a large bowl and break up the comb using a potato masher. I then strain the honey through a kitchen sieve and am left with runny honey in the bowl below and lovely natural honey wax in the sieve. Other pieces are eaten straight from the hive as honeycomb, just as nature intended. ♣

Fero hour

DECEMBER IS THE MONTH OF RITUALS AND PLANS. WILL THERE BE NEW POTATOES, FRESH PEAS, STRAWBERRIES AND RASPBERRIES READY FOR CHRISTMAS DAY?

We've only ever missed one set of homegrown new potatoes.

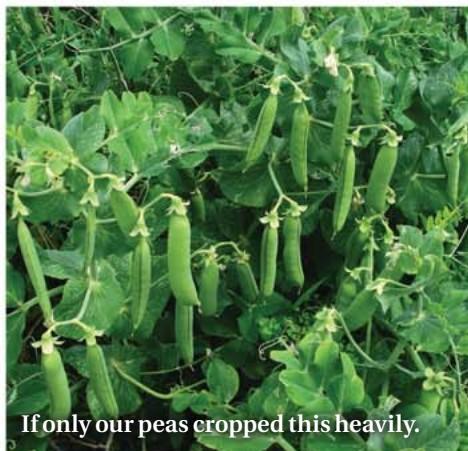
If memory serves me right, it was an advanced season and we had eaten all the first crops and hit a lull.

Peas are more problematic and require some precision of timing and management. I adore fresh peas, though I lose interest when they are podded and boiled. Browsing from the plant is my preference, followed by raw in salads.

Peas generally do better in cooler climates. I confess that the ones in the photograph are in England. Ours never crop that heavily. There are more productive options where space is limited, not the least being beans. But nothing can replace the taste delight of fresh peas. We never have a Christmas turkey here, but we do peas if we can.

Some years the raspberries will ripen in time for Christmas Day.

The week or two after Christmas they come on stream at an alarming rate, but whether those early ones make the deadline for dessert is beyond our control. Even with our raspberry cage it is an ongoing battle between humans and birds, mostly blackbirds. They will scout out the slightest weakness in the cage, squeezing through tiny gaps in their determination to help themselves. The wretches will also breach the cloche defences to take out the strawberries we guard for Christmas breakfast.



If only our peas cropped this heavily.



The toetoe tree was a tour de force.

PHOTO: MICHAEL JEANS

Christmas trees, we've had a few.

The DIY ethos rules unchallenged, we have never bought a tree and never had a tinsel one. Generally we have wildling pines from the property. If we are lucky, Mark has preselected one and actually given it a couple of trims to get the growth denser. More often, he resorts to wiring in additional branches in a vain attempt to create something akin to the commercially trimmed pines, or the Northern European abies with their wonderful conical shapes.

By far, our most creative tree was the one our second daughter made out of toetoe a few years ago.

Home from London, she was inspired by an illustration she had seen of one created from the plumes of pampas grass. No pampas here – it is on the absolutely banned list as a noxious weed. But toetoe (which was once a *Cortaderia* but has now been reclassified as an *Astroderia*) is our native substitute.

Should you wish to try this at home, be warned. It takes more toetoe plumes than you think.

They will moult through your car boot, and will gently shed in the house all Christmas. But then so do pine needles.

The next year I recycled the frame and created something more permanent, woven out of grapevine prunings I had saved. There are step-by-step instructions for both trees on my website. Go to jury.co.nz and type in "Construct your own Christmas Tree".

All this is entirely academic for us

this year. After three decades of building our own family traditions and keeping them the same as assorted offspring migrated home for Christmas, this is the first year we will not be celebrating at home. We are heading over to join the Australian-domiciled daughters and their families. It will be different as the next generation build their traditions for the festive season. I guess it may even be prawns on the barbie! ☺

Kapiti Coast

JULIAN
MATTHEWS

GREAT PLANTS

Streptosolen jamesonii, the
orange marmalade bush,
flowers profusely from early
spring into summer.



Tui takeout



Edgeworthia gardneri



Tibouchina 'Groovy Baby'



Hybrid clivia berries

SOME CLAIM THAT THE FLOWERS OF *STREPTOSOLEN JAMESONII* ARE SO BRIGHT THAT SUNGLASSES ARE REQUIRED, BUT GENERALLY THE REACTION IS ENTHUSIASTIC, ESPECIALLY FROM WOMEN WHO GO INTO RAPTURES OVER IT

There really couldn't be any other common name for *Streptosolen jamesonii* than orange marmalade bush, as a glance at the orange and yellow flowers shows. This tall shrub for mild-climate gardens grows fast and flowers profusely from early spring and well into summer, sometimes intermittently into autumn as well.

This native of Ecuador, Peru and Colombia is drought tolerant once established and seems untroubled whether soils are poor or rich, but good drainage and sunshine are important.

I grow it with other hot-coloured favourites, such as single-flowered dahlias and cannas, and blue salvias (compact *Salvia patens* in the foreground; tall, sometimes rampant *Salvia uliginosa* at the rear) for contrast. Tui appreciate the tubular flowers for their nectar too. Plants are available by mail order from Woodleigh Nursery (woodleigh.co.nz).

Rather different in stature is *Tibouchina 'Groovy Baby'* which is a recent arrival on the scene and is sometimes seen in garden centres. This is a true dwarf, said to grow no higher than 45cm, with a very tight habit. I've had a plant since autumn and it produced the occasional flower throughout winter, then by mid-September it started flowering freely again and seems set to carry on all summer and into next autumn.

'Groovy Baby' seems to have been bred for cold hardiness as well as prolific flowering, but it's still not likely to stand more than light frosts in open situations. However, it's ideally suited for use as a container plant in a sunny situation (I saw one in an orange pot looking delightfully Mexican recently) or at the front of a border in well-drained soils. It is, of course, the answer for those gardeners who admire the flamboyance of tibouchinas but don't have the space for the usual large-growing varieties. The flowers of 'Groovy Baby' are almost as large as those of the traditional varieties, which adds to the startling effect.

I have often intentionally planted trees and shrubs in the garden for their tui-attracting abilities, as much as for their beauty, but in the case of *Edgeworthia gardneri* I had no idea that it would be such a hit with the native nectar eaters. The tui love it, returning again and again over the almost three-month flowering.

I should point out that there are some significant differences between this edgeworthia and the much better-known *Edgeworthia papyrifera* which is sometimes known as yellow daphne and is an intriguing and sweet-smelling feature of gardens in late winter and early spring. *Edgeworthia papyrifera* is a compact, rounded, deciduous shrub, whereas *Edgeworthia gardneri* develops into

small tree proportions in time. It can be pruned hard to keep it lower though.

Another difference is that *Edgeworthia gardneri* is evergreen and is not particularly cold hardy whereas *Edgeworthia papyrifera* takes the cold well. With *Edgeworthia gardneri* the flowering period is later and far more prolonged. Its scent is less pronounced, but it has the same gentle, sweet scent when you put your nose right into the ball-shaped flowers. Both need good soils and prefer a reasonably sunny site, although I do have *Edgeworthia papyrifera* growing reasonably well in moderate shade. Both have a long history of being used for paper making. *Edgeworthia gardneri* appears to be a bit of a challenge to propagate, but Woodleigh Nursery usually have a few in stock.

The berries of the broad-leaved hybrid clivias are becoming a feature at this time of year,

the bright flowers having finished months ago. The berries on their stout stems are great fun as they develop, starting out a classy matt green, then turning to bright colours as they ripen – shiny reds and oranges of varying sizes and, in the case of the yellow-flowered varieties, shades of buttery yellow. Even when ripe these berries hang on for a very long time, brightening the shady spots where these drought-tolerant perennials like to grow. Some folk like to pick the stems for the vase, which seems a shame, as it means the garden display comes to an end prematurely, but they are certainly attractive when brought indoors and will last a long time, providing the water is refreshed at intervals. ♣



No Christmas trifle, pav or sponge is complete without berries.

BERRY XMAS



LET'S FACE IT, BERRIES GO WITH PAV LIKE CHOOKS GO WITH STUFFING. IN NELSON, GOING BERRY PICKING BEFORE CHRISTMAS TO GET THE TOPPING FOR THE PAV OR TRIFLE IS A LONG-STANDING TRADITION

Before Christmas local berry farms get busier than Pak 'n Save on Christmas Eve. Even the local Lions club turns out to ensure orderly parking as the hordes descend.

And when in Nelson at Christmas there is only one berry on everyone's list, and that is the boysenberry.

A fresh, sun-ripened boysenberry will see off the best strawberry in any battle of the berries. They melt in your mouth with a floral, sweet flavour that is rich and lingering. No wonder kids can eat their own weight in boysenberries. Ask any berry farmer and they will tell you they'd love to have a set of scales to weigh "pick your own" patrons on arrival and departure.

When we moved to the Nelson region 10 years ago, we were so well served with berry farms that I saw little point in putting in a berry patch at home. Two trips a year to the PYO farms for the pre-Christmas boysenberries and the autumn blackberries and late blueberries was all that I needed to fill the jam jars and freezer for the year. Someone else tended the crop and all I did was turn up, pick and pay.

We've seen three out of our five local berry farms close in recent years.

I could get outraged and on my dignity and say there should be a law against it, but seeing as the returns from berry farming are unlikely to match the returns from land development, I think my protest would fall on deaf ears.

So although there are a couple of great PYO berry farms still left in the region, it looks as though I may have to add a berry patch to the home orchard in the near future.



Boysenberry vines in training.

Boysenberries are actually relative newcomers to the berry scene.

They don't even get a mention in my 1953 edition of the *Yates Garden Guide*, which covers loganberries in some detail. They're a cross between a loganberry, blackberry and raspberry. They were bred in the USA in the 1930s and made their way to New Zealand where they weren't grown commercially on a widespread basis until the '60s. Nelson was at the forefront of growing them and still produces the majority of the crop, although they are grown across the country.

A bit like the feijoa, we took to them with gusto, breeding many different varieties that you will not see outside of New Zealand.

When I lived overseas I would have walked through a blackberry patch to eat some boysenberry ice cream.

The good news is that boysenberries are quite easy to grow at home throughout most of the country. Boysenberries like a slightly acidic soil, like most berries. If you're not into testing the pH of your soil you can always just add plenty of pine needle mulch and good amounts of garden sulphur, along with your regular organic matter, lime and rotted manure.

Berries like well-drained, deeply worked soil. Once you've put your berry bed in, it is going to be there for a while, so preparing the soil well is a good investment in your future harvests.

Apply lots of mulch around the canes in spring to keep the weeds down and the moisture in over the growing season. Berry canes that are planted in poorly prepared soil and don't get enough moisture produce miserable, wizened crops.

Build a fence to support your berries. A three- or four-wire fence around 1.8m high

provides the best structure to train canes onto. It allows good airflow to prevent mildew, doesn't take up much room, gives you a good structure to put bird netting over and provides easy access to the fruit. Allow 1.2m between canes.

One mature boysenberry plant will yield enough fruit to decorate six pavs – roughly equal to 2kg of fruit if you're not keen on a per pav measure. For fresh eating, jam and freezing, around three to four boysenberry plants will do most households.

Pruning is easy. Each winter remove the old fruiting canes at ground level and tie up the new canes that have grown the previous summer. They will fruit the coming summer.

There are many boysenberry varieties on the market, but being from Nelson we love the 'Tasman' and 'Mapua' varieties for their reliable fruiting and production of fruit from December through to late February. 'Tasman' is reliably early; 'Mapua' is less prickly and slightly later.

Judging the moment of ripeness for boysenberries is a bit of a dark art, which the blackbirds have mastered.

Boysenberries look ripe well before they are and a deep red boysenberry can still be mouth-puckeringly sour. Wait till the fruit turn a slightly dull, dark black before picking. The slightest pressure should see it come away from the cane into your hand.

So now you know how to grow your own boysenberries, I hope you have a new appreciation for the efforts that the berry farmers go to for you each year.

Now all you have to master is how to make the perfect pav. Luckily, while I am a berry beginner, thanks to my mum I make a mean pav! ♣



Redheads

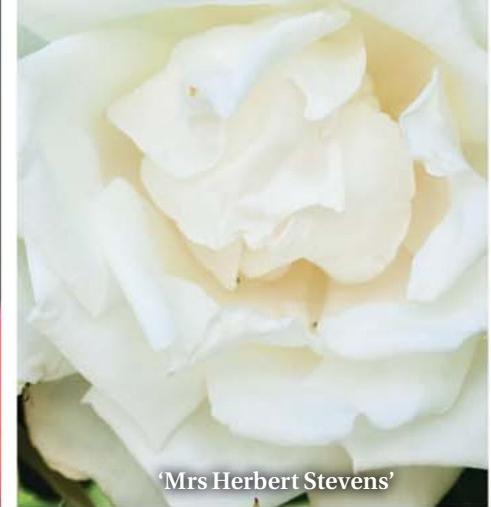
A NICE LITTLE STORY FOR CHRISTMAS. MY FRIEND KIRSTY ARRIVED WITH A BIRD'S NEST. I'M NOT INTO BIRDS' NESTS REALLY BECAUSE TOUCHING ANYTHING FEATHERY SENDS ME SCREAMING DOWN THE LANE

While I like birds well enough, my aversion to feathers is just one of those things that can't be controlled (perhaps I was savaged by my grandmother's chooks as a toddler...).

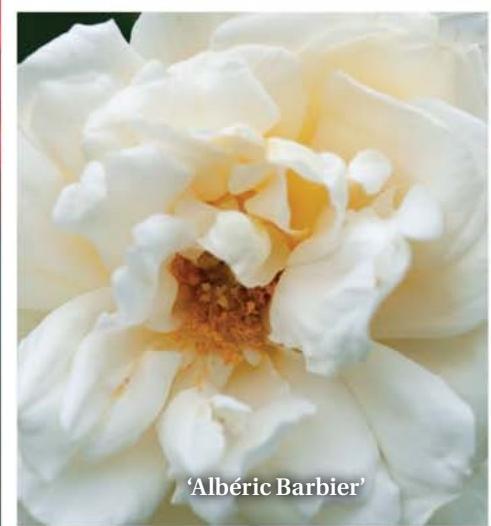
Kirsty, however, collects and displays interesting nests. She found this one, obviously last year's model, hidden high in the branches of the roses that cover a long pergola in her garden. 'Mrs Herbert Stevens', one of the most glorious pure white climbing Tea roses; the German-bred 'Elfe' rose, which has huge ivory-green flowers; the old Noisette rose 'Lamarque' with leemony-white double flowers; and the evergreen rambler 'Albéric Barbier' all intertwine to form a thick mat of foliage and flowers there.

There were no feathers in this nest, which was small, round, lined with soft brown material on the inside and edged on the outside with green moss.

'Dublin Bay'



'Mrs Herbert Stevens'



'Albéric Barbier'

I told Kirsty it was the softest, and prettiest nest I'd ever seen.

"It should be," she said, "It's made with my hair." On looking closer I saw that the inside of the nest was auburn human hair which had been intricately woven into a soft, weatherproof home for baby birds.

Nine years ago, Kirsty had chemotherapy after breast cancer surgery. Rather than waiting for her hair to gradually fall out, she cut it off and kept it in a plastic bag to look at, in case she never had hair like that again – or perhaps as a memory for loved ones.

Her hair grew back, auburn and lovely, and she forgot about the bag of hair until she found it in a drawer and decided to throw it out. She put it in the bin and it was taken away by the rubbish truck. Or so she thought, until she found the nest. Now the nest is displayed in true Victorian splendour under a glass dome, a reminder, perhaps, of the connection between all living things.

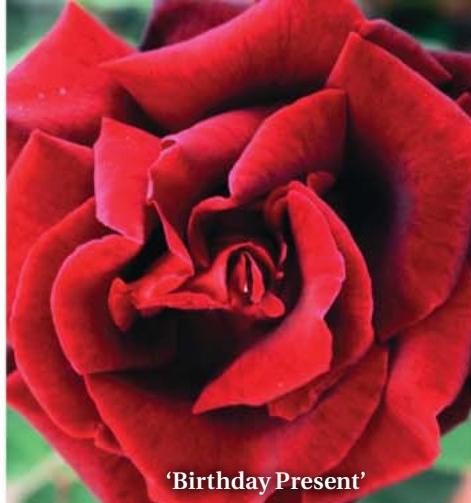
When it comes to Christmas decorations it takes a lot to beat red roses in crystal vases – or jam jars – on the table. You need big bosomy roses on long straight stems, so if you have them growing, bring them inside and the whole house will have that true Christmassy smell: a mixture of Christmas cake, roses and a real tree if you can get one.

Don't make my mistake. My potted tree was so cute I couldn't bear to let it die, so I planted it outside.

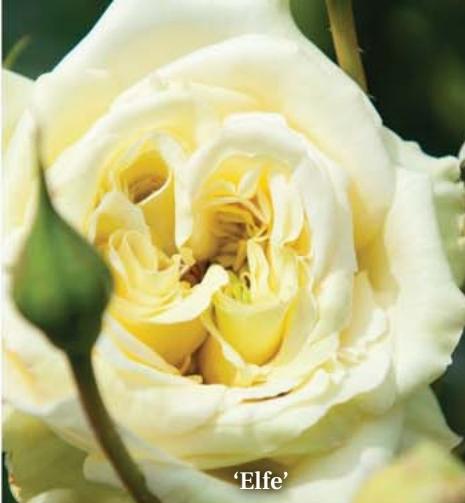
I thought it would be fun the next year for my grandchildren to have their presents on a tree outside – and a whole lot less messy. That was about 15 years ago and although I've kept desperately "limbing it up" as the years passed, I now have a very well-kept pine tree higher than the house and covering most of the back garden.

A luscious red rose for Christmas is 'Birthday Present', surely the most sumptuous of climbing Hybrid Teas.

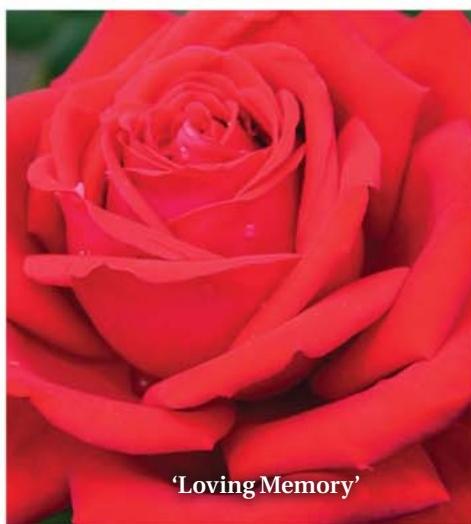
Big classic blooms are deep velvety red and fragrant, leaves are large and glossy, there are very few thorns, and growth is



'Birthday Present'



'Elfe'



'Loving Memory'



'Lamarque'

vigorous. That's the good news. Nurseries have a love-hate relationship with this rose because it blooms only in November and December, and it can throw a hissy fit on occasions. But to grow it is to love it and I would swap a dozen mediocre roses for one 'Birthday Present'. It was bred in Australia by an amateur rose breeder, Douglas Toogood, who named it because its first flower appeared on his birthday.

If you want flowers for longer than two months, plant 'Dublin Bay', the most reliable red climbing rose. My plant doesn't get much attention, but it's out there now flowering its heart out. It's disease resistant and generous with its clusters of bright red blooms. No perfume though.

If you don't want a climber, 'Barkarole' is a strong-growing, upright Hybrid Tea with darker veining on the red velvety petals. It's resistant to black spot and repeats through the season.

'Loving Memory' is another bushy Hybrid Tea, tough and disease resistant, with big crimson flowers on strong stems.

'Lest We Forget' is a Floribunda bred by our own Bob Matthews, so we know it's hardy. It has big cherry-red flowers on

strong stems and lasts well in a vase.

We are spoilt for choice with red roses that bloom around Christmas, so everyone should grow at least one of them. ☺

ROSE THERAPY

Roses start to look a bit tired by December, so carry out these few essential tasks.

- 1 Make sure roses are well watered, preferably from ground level rather than overhead. An automatic irrigation system is well worth buying, but get a simple one or it will drive you crazy.
- 2 Deadhead repeat-flowering varieties religiously, cutting just above the first five-leaved growth node if possible. This encourages you to have vases of flowers and the rose to continue producing them.
- 3 Regularly remove weeds around the base of roses to aerate the soil and before they set seed.
- 4 December is the best month for trimming box (buxus) edgings. It's greedy and will take nourishment from roses, so if roses are nearby, cut back the roots of the box with a sharp spade.

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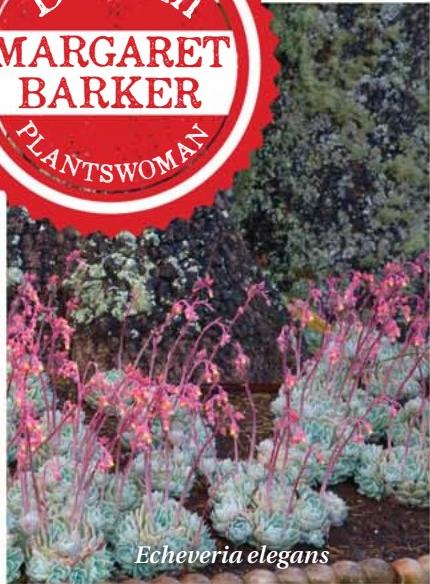
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Echeveria elegans



Beschorneria yuccoides



Aciphylla glaucescens

Dirty dancing

I LIKE TO GARDEN FOR THE SEASONS, FOR MY OWN AND THE VISITORS' ENTERTAINMENT, AND I THINK OF THE GARDEN HERE AS A BALLET

South and inland New Zealand have distinctive seasons, which bring change and drama to the landscape and garden. My garden ballet is in acts: spring, summer, autumn, with a winter intermission. Each season different flowers, the dancers, come centre stage in their costumes, then retire to the wings as fresh dancers come forward. This ballet is sexual; should we be watching? Flowers flaunt their lovely looks in order to continue their species. During winter the structural set is evident, to be appreciated for its architectural, textural and spatial qualities. This intermission should be enjoyed with champagne and smoked salmon as at the Mariinsky Ballet in Russia.

By December spring flowers are definitely over; summer displays are yet to peak. But some plants, grown mainly for their strong structural qualities, erupt into marvellous floral displays.

Round the base of a cabbage tree on the Alice Lawn, there was just a mess of dirt, ringed by scruffy grass

before it merged with real lawn. I wanted to tidy it up, so I purchased some Victorian ceramic garden edging tiles from an antique shop in Auckland. The castle gardeners set the tiles in place around the scruffy bits, encircling the cabbage tree. I then planted *Echeveria elegans* within this new bed. The ceramic edging looks like a pastry crust and the echeveria resembles piped meringue on top. A pie in the garden; how cool is that? *Echeveria elegans* hails from Mexico from semi-desert habitats, and is just as hardy here. It bears 10cm stems of pink flowers tipped with yellow, which hang from one side. It looks excellent all year, with silvery, fleshy-foliaged rosettes. This echeveria,

sometimes called the Mexican white rose, prefers well-drained soil, with full sun. Nip off spent flower heads. Rosettes can be divided and spread around.

My *Beschorneria yuccoides* plant is huge now – I'm so proud of it.

Its natural environment is high in the mountains of Mexico, where it grows at 2700 to 3000m. This large, tufted perennial has 80cm-long, glaucous, slightly fleshy, sword-shaped leaves. Coral-red, arching, 1.5m flower stems emerge, from which dangle green flowers encased in pink and red bracts. At Larnach Castle it thrives on a ledge of a dry stone wall, facing north. The naturally light soil has not been amended. You don't have to do anything for this plant except for deadheading and occasionally tidying up spent leaves.

New Zealand native *Aciphylla glaucescens* has stunning foliage which looks like fibre optics.

It grows 70cm wide and high and its 1.5m flower spikes have spectacular structural complexity. I planted several in the Lost Rock Garden. *Aciphyllas* are dioecious, which means that plants are either male or female. Sex in the garden again! Seedlings popped up and we used them to plant the new South Seas garden. These were lifted small to prevent damage to the taproots.

Aciphylla glaucescens requires well-drained soil that does not dry out. It is a sharp and prickly beast, but can be dead headed with long-handled loppers and tidied up from a distance by using a leaf rake.

Now for my best hot tip: if you have a place where you don't want kids or visitors to venture, put in a prickly aciphylla. ♣



Gardener's footprint.



Cap'n Cabbage Tree sights land.

LAND AHoy

MY GARDEN'S SO JAM-PACKED WITH PLANTS THAT THEY'RE PUSHING EACH OTHER OUT OF THE SOIL TO CLAIM THEIR SPOT

I like it that way and they seem to as well. Not for us, the carefully spaced beds of the cautious gardener. We do overabundance and we do thick. Though I love soil – teaming with life, dark with humus, shot through with mycelium and feeder-roots – I don't want to see it.

Soil should be blanketed with leaves and live plants that rise and fall like slow-motion fireworks, rocketing-up, bursting with colour, tumbling spent to the earth. Mine is. Trilliums get buried by garden-variety wild chervil and Alexanders, liquorice disappears beneath a wave of foxglove and mullein. I don't care. It's sink or swim here in my tidal garden where the understorey of juicy herbs ebbs and flows to match the estuary, which I can see when I clamber up the trunk of a cabbage tree.

I dress as a gardener should – in dirty rags mostly, though I do wear bare feet as surfers do. The ground is soft to walk upon and shoes would only come between me and my work. It means that I have to wield my garden fork with restraint, and I do, not only for the sake of my feet but also for the soil that doesn't require forking and exposing to the harsh light of day and its carbon-gassifying ways.

What are the tasks that a garden such as mine requires right now?

Already, the early afternoon can be too hot for working in, so most tasks are started in the morning. Sow peas wherever there's space. They are the best crops for a garden that styles itself "tangled". Peas boost soil fertility by adding nitrates below the surface. They cover exposed ground with their scrambling, climbing habit and flower gorgeously. Their stems become "pea straw" once they're spent and their pods and seeds are grandchild favourites. Everything about the pea is positive. Plant them profusely.

Set out celery. The usual practice is to buy seedlings, or grow them yourself, in potholes or directly into the open ground if you have the climate for it. Celery likes to be watered... and watered and watered. It's thirsty and goes bitter on you if you hold back the fluids. Dig a trench and plant celery into the base. Water the newly planted crop in well and do so whenever you are on-site. Soil can be drawn in to cover the stems to a certain height, which will exclude the sun and cause them to be sweeter than those exposed to the light. You might prefer to keep them clean by wrapping cardboard around the stems and sweetening them that way.

Carefully nurtured pumpkins and marrows can be planted outdoors.

Choose the ideal spot. Where northern pumpkins become enormous, ours tentatively swell and sometimes fail to ripen, thanks to our cooler temperatures and delayed start to the cucurbit-growing season. Wherever they are grown they enjoy rich soil and plenty of water. They'll do well with regular dowsings of liquid fertiliser, and some attention to their flowers at pollination time will also pay off.

You have still got time to plant out late-season potatoes. If, like me, you're trying to replicate the natural conditions in which potatoes grow in their native land, set out your seed potatoes on the surface of the soil and mound them over with mulch. As the "tops" push through, add more leaves, clippings, straw or whatever you have to spare, so that the stems and leaves spread far in search of sunlight. It's along these stems that your potato crop will form. Take care that the tubers don't see the sun, or they'll green up and become unsuitable for eating.

Plant sweet corn plants in your sweet corn microclimate zone.

This will be beside a fence if you're like the successful growers of corn that I've met in Southland. Your hottest spot is the only one that corn will thrive in. A fence that holds or reflects heat will increase your chances even further. Plant in clumps if you can, or lines if you have no choice. The wind will do all it can to ruin your crop and lower the stalks from vertical to horizontal, so plan accordingly. Again, it's the fence that will bring success. 

OFF THE
BEATEN
TRACK
WITH



Sir Miles Warren's garden,
Ohinetahi, in Govenors Bay.

A gardener's road trip to Banks Peninsula

EDITOR JO MCCARROLL AND AKAROA LOCAL BARBARA LEA TAYLOR

SUGGEST 20 GARDENING ATTRACTIONS FOR GREEN-FINGERED VISITORS PLANNING A TRIP AROUND THE BANKS PENINSULA

Banks Peninsula was named for Joseph Banks, the botanist who sailed with Captain Cook on his voyage around New Zealand, and the area is still crammed with enough horticultural treasures to delight any green-fingered passers-by. You can't get lost on a road trip from Christchurch to the seaside village of Akaroa – there is only one road – and if you didn't stop you would get there in about an hour and a half. But we'd suggest stopping often, and taking a few detours en route, since the Peninsula is crammed with attractions sure to delight horticulturally minded tourists.

1 STOP IN AT SIR MILES WARREN'S GARDEN IN GOVERNORS BAY

If you see only one garden on the Peninsula, make it this one. Created by noted architect Sir Miles Warren (and gifted by him to the nation a couple of years ago), Ohinetahi is well known for its series of garden rooms, including the formal rose garden and large herbaceous border. But Sir Miles and his team don't keep this garden as a series of set pieces; it's constantly evolving, with a whole new garden area having been created after the September 2010 earthquake resulted in damage to the house (the sandstone which previously made up the second storey has now been used to terrace a natural amphitheatre with views out over the harbour and an area above it planted in tessellating coprosmas and corokias). The garden is open on weekdays from mid-September to mid-December and mid-January to mid-March, weekends by appointment. Admission is \$15. Phone 03 329 9852.

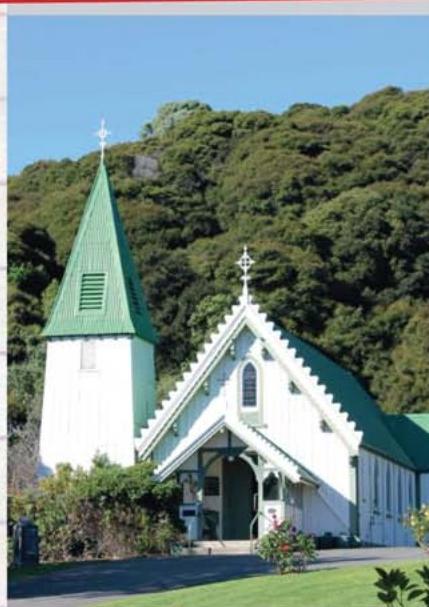
2 LET YOUR INNER CHILD LOOSE AT THE GIANT'S HOUSE ON RUE JOLIE

It would be a singularly hard heart that wasn't lifted upon visiting Josie Martin's colourful and playful garden, liberally scattered with artworks and mosaics. The garden was closed for a few months this year while earthquake repairs took place, but reopened in November. Open every day except Christmas. Admission is \$20 for adults, \$10 for children. Visit thegiantshouse.co.nz for more info.



THE GIANT'S HOUSE WAS NAMED BY A CHILD BECAUSE IT WAS SO BIG.

RATHER PROSAICALLY, IT WAS ACTUALLY BUILT BY A BANK MANAGER.



Clockwise from top: Mosaic has been used extensively in The Giant's House garden; 'Iceberg', 'Sylvia' and 'Sally Holmes' edge a verandah at Paua Bay Farmstay; Pop in to St Patrick's in Akaroa. Father Shannahan loves visitors almost as much as he loves roses.

3 STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES AT PAUA BAY FARMSTAY IN AKAROA

Sue and Murray Johns have created this garden over the last 30-odd years, and now offer B&B accommodation on what is still a working sheep farm. The verandahs offer spectacular views out over the bay, but Sue has had to situate most of her roses round the back to protect them from the prevailing sea winds. The garden includes some significant native trees, including a kahikatea that's estimated at 600 years old, as well as a big vege patch, a dovecot and lots of Sue's favourite roses (the Hybrid Musk Walk should be looking spectacular now). For more info, visit pauabayfarmstay.co.nz.

4 SPEAKING OF ROSES, STOP BY ST PATRICK'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Father Paul Shannahan, who's been at the parish for a couple of years now, is a great rose man and a fierce competitor in the local rose shows. When Father Paul arrived, there were a few 'Iceberg' roses round the back, but he's added dozens more, so this historic church is now surrounded by roses, including many Chinas and about 30 mini varieties.

5 AND DON'T MISS THE OLD ROSES AT THE AKAROA MUSEUM

The Langlois-Eteveneaux cottage (built in the 1840s) now houses part of the museum, and around it roses from that period have been planted.



Clockwise from top left: Riverwood Gardens specialises in rhododendrons; Stopping for lunch at Little River Store and Art Gallery – I narrowly resisted buying a metre-high frog statue; Medicinal plant farm, Phytofarm; me, doing a spot of souvenir shopping (who can resist reasonably priced sheep manure?); The Iris Garden; DoC's Motukarara nursery offers plants endemic to the Canterbury area, including *Clematis paniculata*.



6 STOP IN AT THE IRIS GARDEN AND PICK UP A POTTED TUBER OR TWO

If you are driving to Akaroa from Christchurch, a very slight detour takes you to Motukarara, where Julie May's Iris Garden is open from mid-October until late November. Julie is passionate about the iris genus and has Ron Busch's iris selections available – the so-called Irwell Collection is named after the small town near Leeston where Ron spent more than four decades hybridising irises. Julie also had a lot more talls, as well the knee-high intermediate irises and the shorter border bearded. "They are good for smaller town gardens," Julie says. "People can be a bit afraid of the talls!" Potted irises are available for sale in season and Devonshire teas are on offer too. Visit theirisgarden.co.nz for info.

7 LEARN ABOUT NATIVE PLANTS AT THE CONSERVATION NURSERY

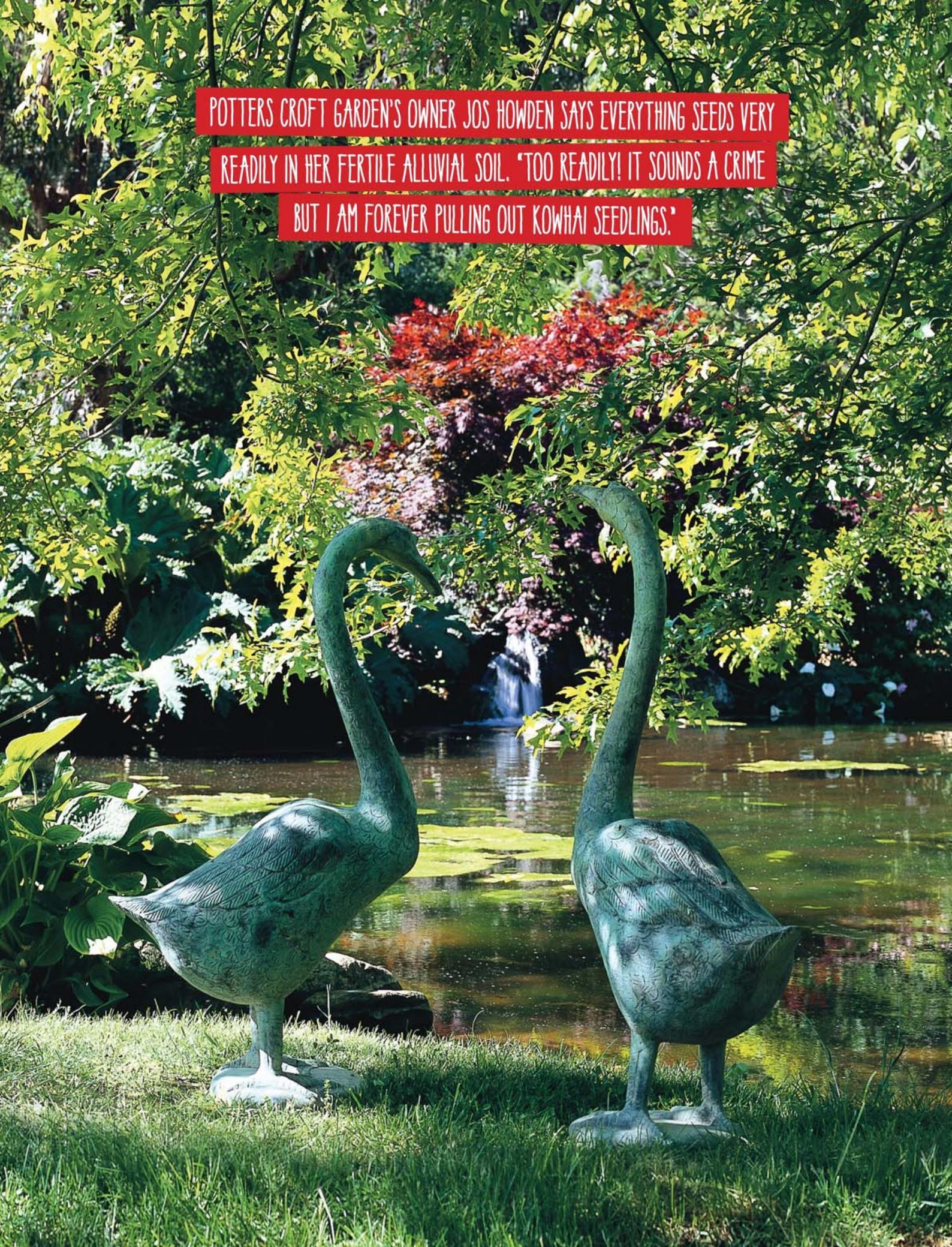
While in Motukarara, pop in on DoC's Conservation Nursery there, which propagates 120,000 plants a year, all from seed collected from native remnants of the Canterbury region (most are used in restoration projects, but visitors can buy plants on-site too). The nursery is open from Monday to Friday as well as Saturdays in May and September, but the display garden in front is open 24 hours and includes plants from all over the Banks Peninsula, as well as threatened plants and plants of cultural significance.

8 IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH WITH A FEW HEALING HERBS

Valmai Becker grows hectares of herbs at the medicinal plant farm, Phytofarm, in Okuti Valley. Garden tours are available between October and July for \$20 per person and there are regular workshops on growing and using herbs. Visit phytofarm.co.nz for more info.

9 PICK SOME BANANAS (AND BUY RHODOS) AT RIVERWOOD GARDENS

Bruce King has just put in a whole lot of bananas (that actually fruit!) at the nursery and open garden Riverwood Gardens in Little River – he claims it's like Tahiti in Canterbury! He's a great rhodo man too, with a dazzling range for sale. Phone 03 325 1040.



POTTERS CROFT GARDEN'S OWNER JOS HOWDEN SAYS EVERYTHING SEEDS VERY
READILY IN HER FERTILE ALLUVIAL SOIL. "TOO READILY! IT SOUNDS A CRIME
BUT I AM FOREVER PULLING OUT KOWHAI SEEDLINGS."



Clockwise from top left: Old roses at Kirsty Cashmore's; Akaroa Lighthouse; Monarch caterpillars at Meniscus; Fishermans Bay Garden; Wild flowers at Birdlings Flat.



10 STOP BY THE MANDERLEY HOME AND GARDEN FESTIVAL

Sadly you've just missed this annual celebration of all things homegrown – it's held every November – so you'll have to plan a trip next year! There's food, music and more than 100 different stalls selling home and garden goodies, including plants, tools and outdoor art. Manderley is named for the Daphne du Maurier novel *Rebecca* – the previous owners were huge fans and based the garden's design on the book. Garden visits \$10 a person. Email marymillar@clear.net.nz.

AKAROA HAS A PERMANENT POPULATION JUST SHY OF 700.

IT CAN SWELL TO 15,000 OVER THE PEAK SUMMER MONTHS.



11 SEE THE WILD FLOWERS IN BLOOM AT BIRDLING'S FLAT

This shingle beach, on the south side of Banks Peninsula, is a good spot for finding small agates among the (attractively round) pebbles. But visit in summer and you'll see wild flowers growing between the stones too (the best display is on the beach just off Coates Road).

12 BUY CHERRIES, PAEONIES, STONEFRUIT AND EGGS

As you are driving thorough the avenue of lime trees that line the road through the tiny settlement of Cooptown, keep an eye out for roadside stalls. There are paeonies for sale in season (look out for the sign reading Waveney) and just before the hill climb begins, Cheskin Orchard offers dark red cherries, peaches, apricots and eggs.



13 SIP ON A WINE AND WATCH THE BUTTERFLIES DANCE

Gay and David Epstein run the Meniscus Wine Lounge in an 1860s cottage on Rue Lavaud and offer wine from their own vineyard nearby on a hill overlooking the town. Gay is passionate about butterflies, so the garden at Meniscus is crammed with plants to bring monarchs in (she's spotted a few red admirals too). There are lots of black-flowering plants – Gay has a theory that the butterflies are attracted to ultraviolet light – and you can visit the chrysalises in her on-site glasshouses.

SMALL CAR, BIG HILL

The drive from Christchurch to Akaroa is surely one of the most enjoyable road trips in the South Island. Not just because of the scenery – although it is pretty spectacular, with every corner you turn seeming to unveil a new and more stunning vista – but because the steep and fairly windy road makes for fun driving. The photographer Sally and I were trialling Mitsubishi's ASX XLS, which has been recently revamped and re-released, and the changes have certainly delivered a smoother on-road performance. With the two of us and light luggage, the 2.0 litre petrol engine had easily enough grunt for the (sometimes precipitous) hills, even in the 2WD ASX we were driving (there's a 4WD option too). Plus the bends in the road gave us a chance to get a sense of the Active Stability Control (or ASC), which allows the car to maintain a safe line through a corner if traction is lost by adjusting the power to the engine. But this city-sized vehicle was compact enough to manoeuvre round the roads (or rather rues) in Akaroa's old town where the influence of those first French settlers can still be clearly seen. The steering was light and precise, perfect for the charming – but a touch narrow! – Akaroa streets. According to Mitsubishi's official figures, the new model delivers a 4 per cent improvement, in terms of fuel economy, on the older version, with an official consumption figure of 7.4 litres per 100km (and if you are looking to lower your environmental impact as well as your fuel bill, it produces just 179g of CO₂ per km). And it's reassuring to know the car has a 5-star ANCAP safety rating, with no fewer than seven airbags (there are driver and passenger airbags, as well as side, curtain and driver's knee airbags). Jo McCarroll



14 BUY FRUIT, VEGES, HERBS, NUTS, HONEY, OLIVES AND FLOWERS

The Akaroa Farmers Market is open on Saturday from 9.30am until 1pm on Rue Lavaud from October until Easter.

15 LOOK OUT FOR ROSES OVER A WHITE PICKET FENCE

Kirsty Cashmore's garden at Villa Vangioni is a dreamy, romantic mix of mainly green, white and purple flowers and foliage. She's a great rosarian – the white 'Mrs Herbert Stephens' over an archway is the most commented on rose, she says, although she also rates pale yellow, fragrant 'Royden' – and there's clematis, hydrangea, viburnum and honeysuckle too. The garden is open by appointment or Kirsty offers a (terribly romantic) B&B. Phone 021 063 2554.

16 CHECK OUT THE GARDEN RESTORATION AT BLYTHCLIFFE

Built in 1857, John and Leslie Harding are restoring the garden of Blythcliffe, one of Akaroa's most distinctive stately homes. Take a garden tour for \$10 and there's an onsite B&B. Call 021 536 016.

17 BANDICOOT A FEW POTATOES AND STEAL STRAWBERRIES

Lynne Alexander has planted enough in her 60-acre garden for B&B guests at Tree Crop Farm to help themselves! Visit treecropfarm.com for more info.

Akaroa Harbour is home to seals, penguins and rare Hector's dolphins – there are kayak and cruise operators based at the wharf if you want to get up close to the native fauna.

18 STROLL IN THE SHADE UNDER THE TREES AT POTTERS CROFT

This 1.2ha garden features a pond, 200-plus roses, rhododendrons and azaleas, as well as large English trees. The garden is open for prearranged garden tours from October through to the end of April for \$10 per person, and there's a self-contained B&B. Visit potterscroft.co.nz for more info.

19 BRAVE THE DRIVE ROUND THE COAST TO FISHERMANS BAY

Jill Simpson's 2ha Fishermans Bay Garden includes mass plantings of hebes, ligularias and other foliage plants that cope with the sea spray and wind (with traditional flower beds tucked in the sheltered spots!). Open Labour Weekend until April for \$10 a person. Email fishermansbay@xtra.co.nz.

20 DON'T MISS THE STUNNING GARDENS AT FRENCH FARM

The artist Nancy Tichborne and her husband Bryan who established this garden have recently sold it – see the story on page 44 – but new owners Jendy and Pat Brooks are passionate gardeners, so luckily the garden is still open. Email jendy.brooks@gmail.com. ♣

Gardening odds & sods

DECEMBER

New plants, Plant Doctor, make a gardener's Christmas cracker, Christmas gift guide, plus win a hamper worth \$1500, Tui plant protection and a Tanya Wolfkamp calendar

NEW PLANTS



CALIBRACHOA 'HOT ORANGE'

has a compact, semi-upright habit and rich tropical-orange blooms. Grows to 15cm high and 50cm wide. Grown by Annton and Rainbow Park nurseries and available from garden centres.



CALIBRACHOA 'PINEAPPLE'

has a spread of 50cm but is quite short (to 15cm). Great as a ground cover, in pots or hanging baskets. Grown by Annton and Rainbow Park nurseries and available from garden centres.



CRAZYTUNIA 'MANDEVILLA'

petunia has star-shaped blooms of fiery magenta with soft yellow streaks. It's robust and vigorous, remains compact and upright in habit and tolerates full sun and heat, flowering all summer. From the Gardening Solutionz range.



'DOUBLE TROUBLE BUTTER CREAM'

is another new perennial petunia from Oderings. It's noted for its double flowers, which cover the plants the entire season. Look for 'Double Trouble Blue' as well.



ALSTROEMERIA 'PASSION'

is a compact plant that reaches 40cm high and 40cm wide. It has bigger and brighter blooms than other alstroemerias and is happy in both garden beds and containers. Grown by Annton Nursery and Evandale Gardens.



'SUMMERSONG PINK BLUSH'

is a Federation Daisy with double blooms from spring to autumn. Prune lightly after flowering to promote a long display. Grows to 80cm. It's frost tender and should be planted in full sun. From GardenPost.



THE OSTEOSPERMUM MARGARITA

range has a colour for every taste ('Dark Pink' is pictured above). It has a bushy habit (up to 70cm high and 60cm wide) and gives bold colour for months. Grown by Annton and Rainbow Park nurseries.



THE WOLLEMI PINE (*WOLLEMIA NOBILIS*),

is one of the world's rarest and oldest living trees. It's from the 200-million-year-old Araucariaceae family and the oldest known fossil of its ancestors dates back to the mid-Cretaceous period, more than 90 million years ago. Scientists think it may even have been eaten by herbivorous dinosaurs!

It was thought to be extinct until it was discovered by chance in 2004 in Sydney's Blue Mountains by a NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service officer. It gets its name from Wollemi National Park, where it was found, and the man who discovered the tree, David Noble. Fewer than 100 mature trees are known to exist in the Wollemi National Park and nowhere else in the world.

The unusual foliage has light apple-green new tips in spring and early summer, in contrast against the older dark green leaves. The branching is unique, with two ranks of leaves along the branches. The bark is distinctive too and looks very much like bubbling chocolate.

Now these living fossils are available to New Zealand gardeners. Plants are hardy, easy to grow and low maintenance, adapting to a diverse range of climatic conditions and thriving in full sun to semi-shade. They can be grown as indoor or patio plants or as a feature tree in parks or large gardens. Grown by Ambrosia Nurseries, Wollemi pine is available from gardeningsolutionz.co.nz.



HYDRANGEA SERRATA 'GLYN CHURCH'

grows to 1.5m and has white mophead flowers that blush pink with age. It's repeat flowering, with new flowers appearing throughout the year. It prefers light shade and can tolerate moist conditions. From Woodleigh Nursery.



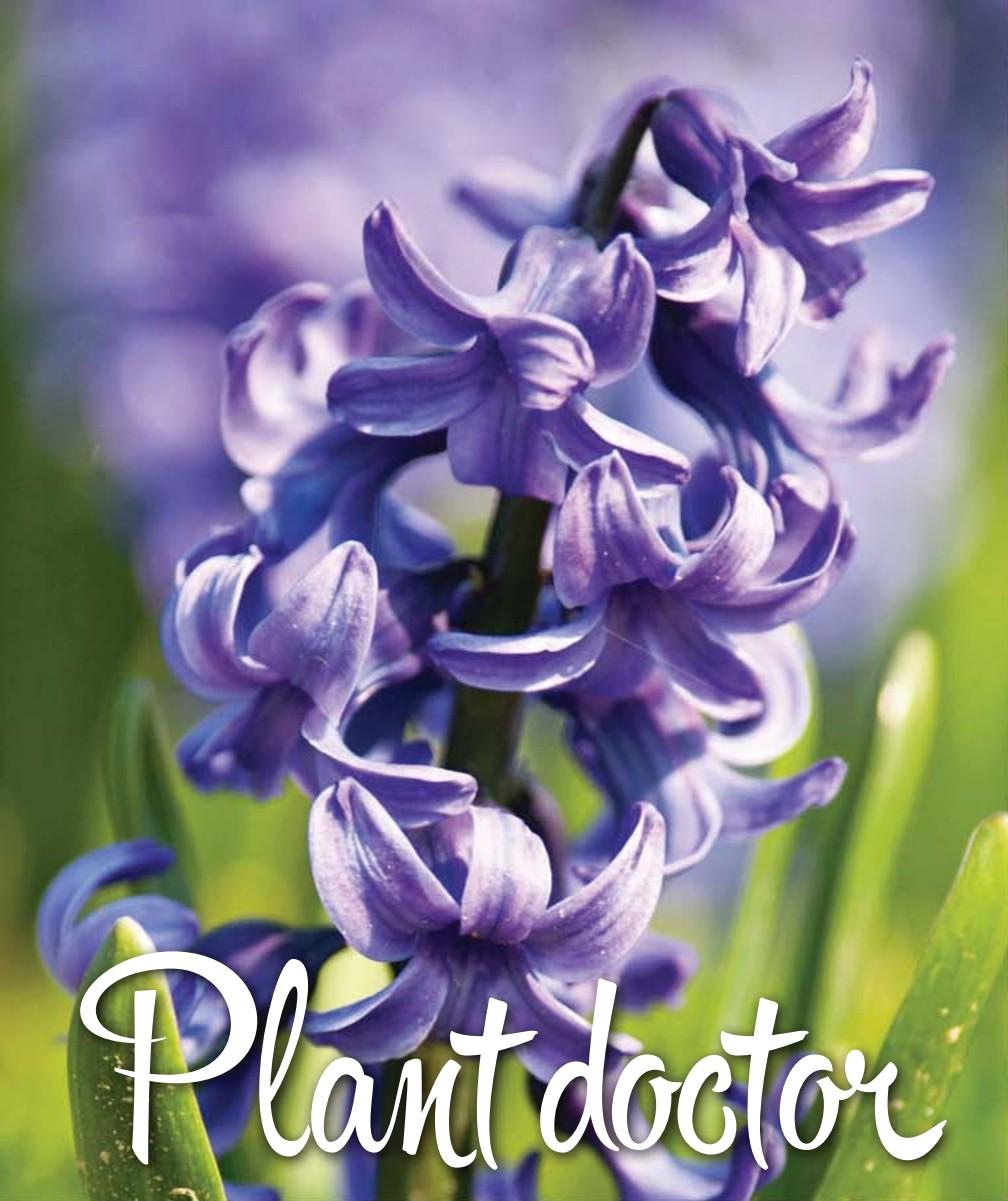
VERONICA 'BLUE STREAK'

has dark foliage and tall stems of powder-blue, cup-shaped flowers with gentian blue veining. It likes full sun and moist, well-drained soil. Prune back in autumn. Grows to 80cm high and 50cm wide. From Mauways Nursery.



PHALAENOPSIS 'YU PIN BURGUNDY'

is a shocking pink moth orchid from Taiwan. 'Yu Pin Burgundy' and many more new colours and patterns are available in a range of flower sizes, miniature to large, from Tuckers Orchid Nursery.



Plant doctor

Q

HYACINTH ENVY

I have tried for two years to grow hyacinths like the ones pictured in "Talk to Your Plants" with Xanthe White in October's issue, but I've had no success. Both pot- and garden-grown bulbs have beautiful green leaves and stems, but the flowers brown and rot as soon as they appear on the stems. Please help me grow these beautiful blooms.

TRUDY MILLER, THAMES

A

I asked specialist bulb grower Paul Hoek, from NZ Bulbs (nzbulbs.co.nz) for help.

Paul says this is an unusual problem.

"Normally if the bulbs and leaves are healthy, then you would expect a good, healthy flower."

"The flower bud develops deep within the bulb during the summer rest period. As the flower is being formed correctly, the problem must be occurring after the stem and buds have emerged in spring."

"Because the problem only occurs after emergence, it is most likely caused by a bacterial or fungal infection of the flowers on the stem. In warmer areas it is possible that the flower bud does not develop properly within the bulb, leaving the top part of the flower dried out when it emerges. This top piece can then become infected and the disease then spreads down the stem."

Paul suggests spraying with some fungicide as the flower emerges to see if that helps in the coming season.

I asked Paul if gardeners in warm areas should buy new hyacinth bulbs every year. Paul replied that gardeners who look after their bulbs shouldn't need to buy new ones. Only replace them if the existing ones are soft or appear diseased.

Grow hyacinths in a sunny spot with good drainage and use fertiliser with more phosphate and potash than nitrogen.

Barbara Smith



Q

WORRY WORT

What is this weed that has sprung up in places where I have sprayed Roundup? The weeds die, but this pest takes its place.

SHERYL NEWPORT, NELSON

A

This is a type of liverwort. They spread rapidly in places where the soil is moist and bare – for example, where you've sprayed. They look like flattened moss with greeny-brown leaf-like structures and often grow in shady lawns or on gravel or concrete paths.

Liverworts don't establish well in free-draining soil where the surface dries out quickly. So the first line of defence is to avoid providing the conditions they like. If it's in a garden bed, try hoeing the surface regularly or use an open, porous type of mulch like granulated bark. If it's growing on a gravel path or driveway, see if you can improve the drainage or add another layer of gravel so the surface dries out more quickly.

Liverworts are resistant to glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup. Try a spray of one part vinegar to four parts water, or sprinkle with baking soda. Commercial sprays to try are Kiwicare Organic Weedfree Rapid or Hitman, which are based on plant-oil extracts that destroy the protective surface of leaves, causing them to dry out and die. Yates Surrender is another option.

Whichever spray you use, you will need to apply it repeatedly, whenever the liverwort reappears. You'll probably find you have a reprieve if there's a long, hot summer, but it will return with a vengeance next autumn and winter when the rains start again.

Barbara Smith



Q

BULB DILEMMA

I haven't got a clue what to do with the freesias, daffodils, bluebells, hyacinths, tulips and snowdrops I planted in pots. They're looking messy, but I want to keep them to grow again next year.

TINA CALLCUT, KAPITI COAST

A

Let the foliage die down naturally. Don't cut it off or tie it up as is sometimes recommended. The flowers for next season are developed inside the bulb this season, so the leaves need to photosynthesise to provide food to the growing bulbs. Do cut off the old flowers, so the plant's energy goes to the bulb, not to seed production.

The foliage does look messy while it dies down. Move the containers to an out-of-the-way place if this bothers you.

If you want to use the containers for something else straightaway, you can take the entire contents (bulbs, roots, foliage and potting mix) and plant it somewhere out of sight while the foliage dies down. If you line the new planting place with chicken wire it will be easier to retrieve the bulbs later. Or you can plant them in the garden where you want them to grow next year. Cover the dying bulb foliage by planting later-flowering perennials and annuals right on top of the bulbs.

You can leave bulbs in the soil year-round. Or, if you do decide to lift them, wait until the leaves are completely dead. Dig up the bulbs. Let them dry off in a cool, airy place. Throw out any damaged or rotting ones. Store in mesh bags (like onion bags) or loose paper bags or cardboard boxes in a cool, dark place.

Barbara Smith

Q

BATTERED BROMS

What are these plants and how should I look after them? Do I need to spray them with copper? Should they be outside or undercover? My garden is by the coast and has some frosts.

CARROLL GOODALL, BAY OF PLENTY

A

This is a billbergia, a type of bromeliad. Billbergias can be grown in the ground, in pots or attached to tree trunks, as they grow naturally as epiphytes. They have attractive striped or spotted leaves, which grow in an elegant vase shape. The flowers often hang down below the base of the plant, so if the plants are grown at eye level the flowers can be appreciated more easily.

I'm afraid to say I've got some bromeliads with brown spots just like yours, so I asked bromeliad grower Jocelyn Coyle from Totara Waters (totarawaters.co.nz) for advice.

Jocelyn identified the cause of the damage as cold or possibly drips from a wooden framework above. Copper and other heavy metals used as wood preservatives can severely damage or kill bromeliads. Never use copper sprays and don't use water collected via copper spouting or stored in galvanised or zinc-coated tanks for watering.

The marks aren't going to grow out. We'll have to wait until new leaves grow from the centre.

To prevent more damage, find a sheltered spot under trees or the eaves to avoid frost. A healthy plant will be less susceptible to cold, but don't overfeed as too much nitrogen will lead to lush growth with easily damaged, thin cell walls.

Barbara Smith

Q

WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

Bumblebees visiting our flower garden seem to act lethargic and hang on to flowers for hours or days ... then die and fall on the lawn. I've noticed it mostly on purple blooms like wisteria and Scottish bluebells but on some other blooms too. Honey bees working on the same plants seem unaffected. Its very disappointing to see these bumblebees dying by the dozen. Why this is happening?

PAT BLAIR, GISBORNE

A

Bumblebee advocate Geoff Brunsden consulted one of the world's leading experts, Professor Dave Goulson from Sussex University. Professor Goulson said, "They might simply be ancient or be infected with one of the many diseases bumblebees suffer from, or be poisoned by neonicotinoid sprays used nearby. Maybe even all three!"

Geoff agrees the bumblebees could simply be at the end of their life cycle. But there is a possibility that a neonic spray may have been used nearby which has contaminated the pollen of some flowers. Neonicotinoids are a class of insecticides chemically related to nicotine. Their use is controversial and has been restricted in some countries. They are less toxic than carbamate and organophosphate insecticides but they have been linked to colony collapse disorder in honey bees. Regarding the possibility of disease, Geoff says New Zealand bumbles don't have the diverse range of diseases UK bees experience.

Have other readers noticed this phenomenon with bumblebees in their garden?

Barbara Smith



GARDEN GIFTS FOR CRACKERS

Use seed labels, mini packets of seeds or bulbs, novel plant ties (like the praying mantis and duck pictured), sun or hand cream or gloves. Remember to add a joke.

SNAP HAPPY

Surprise green-fingered friends and relatives with a garden-themed Christmas cracker

KID PARADE



ELEANOR GRADY (3½)

barrows compost to the vege beds in her Hastings garden.



ISABELLA WILMOT (2)

of Christchurch likes to garden in her tutu and jewels.



QUINTIN NIKORO (4)

helps clear the potato patch on Poppa's Ngatea farm.



SOPHIA IBBOTSON (2)

harvests the broccoli in her grandfather's Kerikeri garden.

DIY CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

YOU WILL NEED • cardboard tubes • wrapping paper • scissors or craft knife • ruler
 • double-sided tape • ribbon or string • cracker snaps (from craft stores or Spotlight) • any decorations you like (pictures, stickers, glitter, felt tips) • little garden gifts (try seeds, bulbs, plant labels, nuts, mini hand creams or sunscreen, chapstick, plant ties, gloves or bird callers)



CUT THE PAPER to fit around three tubes. (For toilet rolls: 30 x 17cm. Adjust dimensions for larger tubes.) Put three pieces of double-sided tape (around 8cm long) along the top edge of the paper and remove the backing strips.



PULL THE END TUBES OUT PART WAY.

Scrnch the paper inwards. Make sure the cracker snap goes right through to both ends and the gift is enclosed in the middle. Tie with raffia, string or ribbon. Remove the end tubes. .



ROLL UP TIGHTLY and secure the tape. Thread a cracker snap through the middle of the tube. Add a little garden gift. All crackers need a corny joke – look them up online and copy neatly onto strips of paper or print them out.



GET DECORATING! Add stickers to the middle section. Or make a sleeve 9 x 17cm to fit around the middle. Draw a picture, sprinkle with glitter, or punch shapes as shown. Roll the sleeve around the cracker and hold in place with tape.



BOE SMITH (20 MONTHS)
of Hamilton has a drink with his mate Sam the Scarecrow.

Send in your photos to win gloves and a watering can from Omni

Each photo published on these pages wins a pair of kids' gloves and a watering can from Omni Products. Visit omniproducts.co.nz to see the full range. Send your photos to Kids' Mailbox, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or email your digital photographs (approximately 1MB in size) to mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz. Please make sure your child is looking at the camera and include his/her age and your postal address.



The Perfect CHRISTMAS Gift

The fun way to grow

Give your kids the tools to inspire the gardening passion in them for life!
 Give them their own plot – they might even start eating their vegetables.



Watering Cans in all their favourite colours

Wheelbarrows

Gloves to protect their hands

Shovels & rakes

Three piece hand tools

And a garden broom to clean up



Omni Products and the Lil' Sprouts range are available at leading garden and hardware stores.

GROWING CONFIDENCE

The Blind Foundation in Whangarei is using gardening to teach leadership and life skills

One of the joys of gardening is that it engages all five senses, not just sight. So when the Whangarei branch of the Blind Foundation and the Whangarei Community Committee were looking for an activity to teach leadership and life skills to children and teenagers who are blind or have low vision, they decided that learning gardening skills was an ideal project.

A group of nine- to nineteen-year-olds was tasked with building and planting four raised-bed gardens behind the Blind Foundation's premises in Kamo Road. They enlisted the support of Mitre 10 Mega Whangarei, which generously donated the garden kit sets they wanted, as well as equipment and plants – even gardening lessons were provided.

Blind Foundation child and family social worker Duncan Anderson says that while the group put the first two beds together under Mitre 10 staff's guidance, they built and planted the last two without any assistance.

They planted the beds with a range of vegetables, including celery, spring onions, capsicums, silverbeet, tomatoes and carrots, along with herbs and scented perennials. Blind Foundation employee Craig Jessop (pictured above, far right) says plant choice was mainly based on properties of scent and touch.

"Our herbs, such as lavender and mint, are great for their fragrance, while some of the other plants, such as the carrots and spring onions, are really tactile."

The group was taught how to identify herbs by smell and touch, as well as how to grow and harvest their own vegetables, fruit, plants and herbs. "It was an amazing experience, seeing them blossom in confidence," says Duncan.

To encourage the group to link their own personal experiences to the garden, Duncan asked the children to talk about their families and to draw parallels between the way plants develop and multiply, just as families do.

The group was also taught how to cook meals together with the produce they had grown. One of the Foundation's local committee members, who is a retired chef with low vision, taught the groups how to prepare pumpkin soup and garlic bread using herbs from the garden.

The group has been on a number of field trips. "We've visited a native bird recovery centre to learn about the role birds play in gardening and have been to an avocado orchard. This summer we're planning a trip to Tiritiri Matangi," says Craig.

This spring the group planted Christmas lilies, star jasmine, a guava tree and watermelon plants, and sowed a variety of vege seeds. They've also started a compost heap and are making use of a worm farm, also donated by Mitre 10.

"The next project is to install a glasshouse or greenhouse," says Craig. "But they're not cheap. We'll happily rehome one if anyone has one spare!"

Blind Foundation communications manager Deb Ward says that acquiring gardening and cooking skills will better enable the group to contribute to society. "But the main thing is that it's helping to build their confidence and that they're learning to work together as a team."

Win \$300 worth of Gardena tools for your school or community garden

Send us photos of the garden and, if selected, your school or community garden will win a \$300 prize package from Gardena, including a hose reel trolley, 15m hose, metal spray-gun nozzle, spade and fork. Send letters, photos and contact details to Garden of the Month, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or email digital photographs (approximately 1MB in size) to mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz.



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this Christmas.**

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Grow your own garden of Eden

Once you start glasshouse gardening you'll be hooked for life, so it's important to make the right choice. Eden is widely reputed in the horticulture and gardening arena for high-quality glasshouses made in NZ. It's horrible having to work in the garden under torturous cold spells of rain, icy blasts and snow, but it's not just you that benefits from the chance to close the door behind you. Your plants will thank you for the stable climatic growing environment where you can easily extend your useful hours and the circadian rhythms of your plant babies. The real benefit to greenhouses comes down to three simple things – it makes all-year-round gardening convenient, simple and pleasant. If you're unsure what the right greenhouse solution is for your needs, give one of our friendly experts a call – we love to help passionate gardeners have a great growing experience. Products can be purchased at www.edenglasshouses.co.nz. Delivery nationwide. **Edenlite Products Ltd, 34B Constellation Drive, Mairangi Bay, Auckland.**



Windowsill gardening

The Mini Smart Garden is the perfect combination of intelligent control technology and hydroponic planting techniques. It is a unique indoor gardening product that is clean and green. The pots have an optional multi-cell planting cover so are great for growing microgreens, bulbs, seeds and herbs for transplanting or use in the kitchen. The fertilised non-soil planting media can be cleaned and re-used multiple times. The Mini Smart Garden control system also has a clever reminder to let you know when to add more water. No dirt, no mess and great results. Ideal for Christmas, so order now from www.growgifts.co.nz.



Love the birds in your garden

Treat the birds this Christmas with a Topflite Wild Bird Energy Coconut feeder. Available at all good pet and garden stores and online at www.pet.co.nz. A great present for the whole family.



Grow up with Climbing Jack

New Zealand-invented growing frame. Suitable for cherry tomatoes, sweet peas, BEANS, tomatoes, passionfruit and other climbing plants. Easy to install and built to last. So it's time to grow up! Give us a call or visit our website for videos and information. Available in four sizes. Visit www.climbingjack.com or phone 0508 272 992.

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Personalised pottery exclusively made by artisan potters in Nelson who blend their own clay and hand paint each item. Robust and dishwasher safe, two designs are available in mugs, bowls and plates perfectly sized for children. \$39.95 each plus delivery. Visit www.nznature.co.nz or phone 0800 77 11 33 for a free catalogue.



Linen Cushion Covers from Jill Main



Vibrant and distinctive designs – featuring the beloved fantail and tui – by New Zealand artist Holly Roach. Printed on natural, unbleached linen. Each cover has a zip closure and fits a standard 45cm-46cm square cushion. \$64.95 each plus delivery. Visit www.nznature.co.nz or phone 0800 77 11 33 for a free catalogue.



Gifts from Gubba

This year Gubba Online Garden Store has your gardening Christmas presents covered with over 850 products, all of which make great Christmas presents for the keen gardeners in your life. We wrap and ship to your door, or the lucky gift recipient saving you time and hassle during this busy season! Weather vanes are our most popular gift item, expertly made in NZ and well presented in a fantastic gift box, with your choice of wooden or cardboard boxes. Made using traditional sand-casting methods, with quality aluminium and brass, they are then powder-coated black to give long-lasting colour and protection from the elements. There are 12 styles to choose from. \$195.00. Our Sneboer Stainless Steel Garden tools make great Xmas gifts too, handmade in the Netherlands by third-generation tool smiths, these tools are designed to last generations making them a gift that keeps on giving. Available from www.gubba.co.nz or phone 0508 448 222.



Morris and James

If you're looking for special gifts for the special people in your life, come on up to the pottery and browse the selection of stunning handmade pottery and ceramics. Unique gifts from as little as \$20, or choose a Morris and James gift voucher – available in any denomination. Sale prices on selected stock right up until Christmas Eve. Easy access and plentiful parking make Christmas shopping a breeze at Morris & James, Matakana.

www.morrisandjames.co.nz. The pottery is open 9 – 5 every day up until Christmas Day, and there's a free tour daily at 11.30am. The pohutukawa platter below is \$79.00.



Bernie's Barrow

Need a BIGGER barrow? Take the back-breaking work out of gardening and cleaning up with an extra-large wheelbarrow that has been built for easy manoeuvring and no-fuss storage. It has four times the capacity of a standard wheelbarrow, better balance and can never get a puncture. Constructed out of lightweight, tanalised plywood and aluminium, it is strong and durable yet light to push. If you want to be the envy of your neighbours, contact Bernie for more information! Visit berniesbarrow.co.nz or phone 04 566 2361.

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Scrumptious sampling of 16 biscuits made in Nelson using freshly-grown, local ingredients. Includes Lemon & Blackcurrant Melting Moments, Orange, Almond & Coconut Biscotti, Chocolate Drop Cookies and Vanilla Bean Shortbread. Each variety is individually wrapped, \$29.95 plus delivery. Visit www.nznature.co.nz or phone 0800 77 11 33 for a free catalogue.



Christmas
GIFT GUIDE



Quilted Double Hammock by Wilson & Co

Everyone will be fighting over the hammock this summer. Made in India, our queen-size quilted hammock is designed for both adults and children seeking a relaxing moment. The fabric is quilted with a poly-fibre filling, as is the bolster pillow, which is designed for its water-repellent, quick drying qualities. The spreader bars are made from a lacquered hardwood, the rope is 3-ply stranded polyester, the grommets are brass plated and the O-rings on both ends are zinc-coated, heavy-duty steel. Hammock bed size: 140cm wide x 208cm long. Hanging distance: 400cm upwards. Support weight: 205kg. \$229. Hammock stand not included and stripe configuration may vary from hammock pictured. www.wilsonandco.co.nz



Stainless Steel Arum Lilies

This unique and thoughtful gift is stylish and versatile – arrange them in a vase, mount them on a wall or stake them in the garden. They are handcrafted by artisan metalworkers in Mapua in two sizes, from \$44.95 each plus delivery. Visit www.nznature.co.nz or phone 0800 77 11 33 for a free catalogue.



Gellerts living gifts

Gift the one you love and decorate your home this Christmas with a beautiful Phalaenopsis orchid from Gellerts! Moth orchids are one of the easiest orchids to grow in the home and if you follow a few basic requirements, including weekly watering in summer and draining well, these plants will reward you with beautiful blooms for many months.

Available now at Palmers, Kings Plant Barn and leading garden centres, supermarkets and hardware stores nationwide. Look for our brand label in-store today! A gift that keeps on living from Gellerts. Visit www.gellerts.co.nz.

Not Socks

Get them Not Socks this Christmas! With over 1000 unique and thoughtful gift ideas, Not Socks Gifts is fantastic for those hard-to-buy-for, have-no-idea-what-to-get-them friends and family on your Christmas shopping list. Check out their wonderful range at www.notsocks.co.nz.



The Company Shed

We've gone crackers for Christmas! Walnut crackers and NEW macadamia nut crackers now available. Visit us online to see our NEW RHS Kneelers, Haws Watering Cans and NZ Made Bird Feeders.

www.thecompanyshed.co.nz

Golly Gosh greeting cards

Beautiful cards made in New Zealand especially for gardeners and their friends! Lots of designs to choose from. Check out www.gollygosh.co.nz.





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Lynn River

Treat yourself or gift someone a pair of Lynn River 'Showa 370 Colours' gardening gloves. Perfect for the garden over summer and would make a great stocking filler at Christmas. Available at most gardening and hardware stores.

Christmas colour from Knights

Give a living gift or decorate your home with Knights houseplants. Poinsettias in traditional red or shades of pink, white and cream are the classic plants for festive Christmas displays. Kalanchoes are easy-to-grow leafy succulents producing long lasting heads of brilliantly coloured flowers. The daisy-shaped flowers of osteospermums come in a wide range of colours to brighten your home or patio. Knights houseplants are available at all leading garden centres, supermarkets and plant retailers. If it has the Knights label, it has the Knights quality.

Ceramic Sculpture by Bob Steiner

These stunning sculptures of New Zealand sea life have a blue-green glaze that blends with a variety of colour palettes for wall, table or bathroom display. Each piece is securely wrapped within an attractive gift box. \$49.95 each plus delivery. Visit www.nznature.co.nz or phone **0800 77 11 33** for a free catalogue.



Wild Ferns New Zealand flowers skincare

A collection of luxurious pampering products created with the unique botanical extract of New Zealand's beautiful native flowers – manuka, pohutukawa, harakeke (flax), kowhai and puriri. The moisturising, rejuvenating and conditioning properties of these extracts are enhanced with manuka honey, essential oils and natural soothing ingredients. www.wildferns.co.nz

Clark Cultivator

Voted garden tool of the year (2013) by Lynda Hallinan this innovative, NZ-made, garden tool makes weeding and cultivating a joy. The sustainable, silver beech handle, with its unique thumb-grip, gives the user great control and dexterity as the stainless steel blade easily cuts through stubborn weeds and cultivates the soil. Presented in an attractive gift box, this makes a superb Christmas present. Price: \$118.50. Find out more and purchase at www.clarkcultivator.co.nz or email Barry at bg.clark@xtra.co.nz.



*Christmas
GIFT GUIDE*



Hang it inside

Bring a world of art to your place with a new selection of wall art that your friends will envy. Lots of sizes and styles to suit most budgets. Available from selected garden centres and good gift stores nationwide. www.omniproducts.co.nz



Living Light Globe Lantern

This sculpted wax globe emits a beautiful warm glow when the enclosed, four-hour soy-wax tea light is lit. Designed to be used both inside and out, it also floats! Made in Golden Bay. \$49.95 plus delivery. Visit www.nznature.co.nz or phone 0800 77 11 33 for a free catalogue.



Handrail Planters

Brighten outdoor living space and have herbs within easy reach. Greenbo planters are the perfect Christmas gift for gardeners. A range of gorgeous colours - uv stabilised in two sizes. No screws or attachments needed with handy detachable drip trays. Find award winning Greenbo planters at www.gardenledge.co.nz or phone 09 442 2154



Welcome the Pole People into your life

Victorian Woodworks in Geraldine is the home of the Pole People seen throughout New Zealand. They make a wonderful addition to any garden. Visit our website and choose from the variety on offer or we can make up your own idea. You will also find our range of traditional wooden toys to please any child. Visit www.victorianwoodworks.co.nz.



Gift for life

Check out Gift for Life for amazing gifts that help families in the developing world. Pick a gift and you'll be sent a card representing it. There's something for everyone with a price tag to match. We love their gardening-inspired gifts that help green fingers all over the world get the best from their land. Visit giftforlife.co.nz.



Auckland Theatre Company

Surprise someone with a night at the theatre this Christmas! Auckland Theatre Company's 2015 season has just been released and gift vouchers are available for individual shows or season passes. Give the gift of theatre this Christmas! To purchase an ATC gift voucher or to receive your free 2015 subscription brochure call 09 309 3395 or visit our website www.atc.co.nz

Victa V-Force+ Lithium Ion 18" mower

V-Force+ Lithium-Ion lawnmower is quieter, easier to operate, and offers longer lasting performance. Perfect for small to medium sized backyards. This mower features an 18" steel deck with a mulch or catch system. It has a brushless motor for longer life and improved performance with a 40 volt 4 amp hour battery. Battery and charger are included. Recommended Retail Price \$749.00 INC GST www.briggsandstratton.com



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NZ Gardener is giving away a festive Christmas hamper

Go into the draw for a hamper crammed with all our favourite garden goodies – tools, seeds, pots, products, planters and more!

To enter:

Write your contact details on the back of an envelope and mail to Festive Hamper, Garden Giveaways, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or enter online by visiting nzgardener.co.nz and writing "Festive Hamper" in the subject line. Entries open December 3 and close December 28, 2014.

YOUR PRIZE INCLUDES: Morris & James urn (\$260), Wilson & Co lanterns (\$49.95), Abeeco range (\$394.45), Auckland Theatre Company double pass (\$130), Parrs Products Flowers range (\$39.95), Garden Ledge red XL pot (\$64.99), NZGINZ gift card (\$50), Gellerts red anthurium in red pot (\$37), 1 pair Skellerup Red Bands (\$80), Tui Products Novatech fertiliser (TBC), TopFlite one red 'bird café' (a bird feeder for feeding nectar or seed) (\$30), Omni Products kids green wheelbarrow plus two pairs of kids glove (one pink/one blue) (\$90), Husqvarna toy grass trimmer (\$45.95), Gardena shower trio (\$59.99), Gubba 38 Litre Gubba bucket (\$28), Four NZ Gardener special editions plus hand-tool box set (\$144), Briggs & Stratton electric pressure washer BWS018 (\$159)

Terms & Conditions: This competition is open to New Zealand residents only. One entry per person. The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Employees of Fairfax Magazines, Fairfax Agencies and promotional suppliers are ineligible to enter. The winner will be drawn at random.

Christmas
GIFT GUIDE

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Bookshelf

IMPERFECT

Emma Bass, published by PQ Blackwell, available from Black Asterisk Gallery (www.blackasterisk.co.nz), from \$95

Photographer and artist Emma Bass takes pictures of bunches of flowers.

But these are not your average, bunged-in-a-vase florist variety bouquets: take a closer look and you'll see subtle flaws, such as saggy stems, wilted buds, drooping foliage and fallen petals. Emma focuses on "the transience of beauty in a world where perfection prevails". If you're after a coffee-table book that's a work of art in itself, *Imperfect* is sure to please. We have one copy to give away. See page 108 for entry details.

1-MINUTE GARDENER

Mat Pember and Fabian Capomolla, published by Pan Macmillan, \$49.99

Eat your heart out Jamie Oliver and your 15-minute meals: these two Aussie chaps reckon you only need 60 seconds to crank into action in the garden. I'm not entirely convinced – there's so much fun to be had in the pages of this book that it takes several minutes of flicking through its pages to find the project you want – but I'm impressed with their get-up-and-go. A great dip-into book to encourage younger, urban gardeners to have a crack at growing food in a small space. I like the groovy design too, though one of my (older) friends reckons it's an impossible-to-read mash-up of text and images. Lynda Hallinan

insurance, taxes, transfers, food and alcohol other than that specified.

Travel and accommodation are subject to availability and must be taken within 12 months, unless otherwise specified. Competitions are open to NZ residents only. Entries are the property of NZ Gardener and may be used for promotional purposes by Fairfax Magazines and/or by the supplier(s) of the prizes. Allow six weeks for prize delivery.

For competition winners, visit www.nzgardener.co.nz. If you do not wish to receive special offers from selected companies, please state:

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GIVEAWAYS



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Visit tuiproducts.co.nz to find out more.



WIN NZ GARDENING CALENDARS

We have three Tanya Wolfkamp calendars featuring garden plants and birds cleverly intertwined with the annual events of Anzac Day, Matariki and Christmas to give away. The soft colour palette has been carefully selected from the Resene 2014 and Karen Walker colour ranges. Published by Live Wires (livewires.co.nz). For a retailer in your area, email sales@livewires.co.nz.

COMPETITION ENTRY DETAILS

Write your contact details and choice of prize on the back of an envelope and mail to Garden Giveaways, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or enter online by visiting nzgardener.co.nz. Entries open December 3 and close December 28, 2014.

Events guide

NORTH ISLAND

December 2014

- Cambridge Christmas Festival.** The magic of Christmas comes to Cambridge. The theme *Christmas Near and Far* is illustrated with Christmas trees decorated with ideas from around the world. Handmade decorations, gifts and preserves for sale. Cambridge Town Hall, Victoria St, Cambridge. Entry is free. Gold coin donations accepted. More details: facebook.com/CambridgeChristmasFestival. **December 4-18**

- Taumarunui Hope Charitable Trust fundraiser Hats and High Tea.** Bring along the most frivolous, flamboyant or fanciest hat you have! Refreshments, bubbles and live music in a beautiful country garden. Raffle drawn on the day with \$3000 worth of prizes from Mitre 10 and five items for auction. Bradleys Garden, 26 Totaranui Dr. 2pm. Tickets \$30 from Taumarunui Mitre 10 Mega. Contact melana.bradley@xtra.co.nz or ph 0274 452 074, bradleysgarden.co.nz. **December 6**

- Tauranga Fuchsia Group Show.** Plants for sale. 9am-4pm. Entry \$3. Tauranga Arts & Craft Centre, Elizabeth St West, Tauranga. **December 6**
- Pukeiti Explorer Day – "Bio Blitz" river study.** Exploring fish stock, plants and the health of the river. Compare a mountain river to a farm river. Learn about macroinvertebrates and freshwater fish. 10.30am-2pm. 2290 Carrington Rd, New Plymouth. Ph 0800 736 222, pukeiti.org.nz. **December 6**

- Love Your Mountain Day.** Mt Eden, Auckland. Free entry to Eden Garden and Government House grounds, activities, art and guided tours at the Kiosk on Maungawhau and Tahaki Reserve. Programme at maungawhau.co.nz. **December 7**
- Auckland Lily Society Christmas Show.** Floral displays and raffle. Good parking. Auckland Horticultural Council, 990 Great North Rd, Western Springs, Auckland. 11am-3pm. Gold coin donation. **December 14**

- Tupare Garden Fair and Guided Walk.** Enjoy the splendour of a Tupare Garden Fair. Arts and crafts, live entertainment, delicious food, house tours and family fun on the river flat. Walk 8.30-10am. Garden Fair 10am-pm. 487 Mangorei Rd, New Plymouth. 0800 736 222. Visit tupare.info. **January 10**
- Auckland Lily Society Summer Show.** Superb lilies of all colours on display. Plants and bulbs for sale. Raffle. Good parking. Auckland Horticultural Council, 990 Great North Rd, Western Springs, Auckland. 10am-3pm. Gold coin donation. **January 10-11**

January 2014

- Art & Garden Trail.** Manawatu's fabulous gardens and artist studios are open 10am-4pm. Landscape artists', fibre artists', weavers', carvers' and wood turners' work for sale. Tickets \$20 per day. Ph 06 323 2323 or email art@fadas.co.nz. **January 17-18**
- Franklin Fuchsia Club Show.** Waiuku Civic Centre, cnr King & Constable Rds, Waiuku. Fri 10am-5pm, Sat 9am-3pm. Contact parkfarm@xtra.co.nz. **January 16-17**
- Waikanae Lions Super Garden Trail.** Twelve wonderful local gardens, chosen for their beauty and variety, will be on display on the weekend following Anniversary Weekend to avoid the congestion of holiday traffic. The funds raised this year will be donated to the Wellington Free Ambulance and the Life Flight Trust. Cost of tickets is \$20 per person per day (children under 15 free). For further information, contact Kevin Woodley, ph 04 293 5711 or email kevinwoodley@xtra.co.nz or Bernie Shiell ph 04 905 7979 or emailshiellb@hotmail.com. **January 24-25**
- Hutt Valley Horticultural Society Begonia and Fuchsia Show.** Displays, plant sales. Sat 12-4pm, Sun 10am-4pm. Admission \$3, children and members free. The James Coe Centre, Dowse Art Museum, Laings Rd, Lower Hutt. All welcome to exhibit, contact Dianne Purdie 04 479 5548 for details. **January 31 - February 1**

SOUTH ISLAND

December 2014

- Cromwell Festive Fête.** 100+ stalls and entertainment. Cromwell Racecourse, Ripponvale Rd, Cromwell. 10am-4pm. 03 445 4329, festiefete.co.nz. **December 6**
- Little River Garden Tour.** Sample local produce while visiting five gardens. 10am-4pm. Tickets \$40 from Little River Gallery or contact Faye ph 03 325 1373, tlf@xtra.co.nz. **December 7**

Free event listings.

Send your event details (at least 10 weeks ahead) to: Events Guide, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141; or email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz with "Event Listing" in the subject line.

Club info is on our website:
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- Learn how you get paid while you travel** and write about it. Free facts pack. Tollfree 0800 801 994. www.nzibs.co.nz

GARDENS TO VISIT

- Carrington House Historic Gardens.** www.carringtongarden.co.nz, [email cameron@wisenet.co.nz](mailto:cameron@wisenet.co.nz).
- Coatesville country gardens.** Open by appointment. Admission charged. Ph Woodbridge 09 415 7525, Mincher 09 415 7469, Twin Lakes 09 415 8762, Pine Lee 09 414 4338, Alafois 09 414 4324, The Garden on the Ridge 09 415 7315.

COURSES

- Art classes and workshops.** For beginners in Auckland and Whangarei. No natural talent required, www.artschoolnz.com.
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Deadline for March: January 27

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INNOTEK



joe bennett

Having reached the letter F of his gardening compendium, our author staunchly absolves the infamous foxglove of any responsibility as he relates a tale of shepherding woe

F ladies and gentlemen, F. In the compendious *A to Y of Gardening* we have reached the letter F. We are therefore close to a quarter of the way through the great undertaking and so intense is my excitement that I sleep only eight hours a night.

The letter F brings riches to the garden: from forget-me-nots to fly agaric to figs. But I have chosen to dedicate this part of the compendium to clearing a reputation. I mean to exonerate the foxglove. To do so, I shall need to set a scene.

I have two steep paddocks where I used to keep two goats and two sheep. (I realise this is all a bit Noah's Arkish but I promise that we shall make eventual landfall on the Mount Ararat of relevance.) The sheep and goats would crop one paddock as closely as a GI's scalp. Meanwhile, the other paddock grew a moptop.

But then, and you have to admire the cunning of this, I would open a gate and drive the sheep and goats into the other paddock. This they now set about cropping while the first paddock recovered. It was a system all of my own which I knew as rotation and I heartily recommend it to any of you undertaking animal husbandry. I also heartily recommend to any of you undertaking animal husbandry that you make certain of your audience before using the phrase "animal husbandry".

But then came one fell morning. (And since we're on F in the *A to Y* I think I can be permitted a wee digression on the adjective "fell". It means terrible or wicked. The only other writer to use the word in the whole of English literature was Shakespeare. When Macduff learns that his wife and children have been killed, he exclaims: "What, all my pretty chickens and their dam at one fell swoop?" To which the messenger replies, "You betcha." (I quote from memory.)

Now, several of you have written to me over the years, asking what to do when someone misquotes Shakespeare, turning one fell swoop into one foul swoop. The approach I favour is to string the perpetrator up by his or

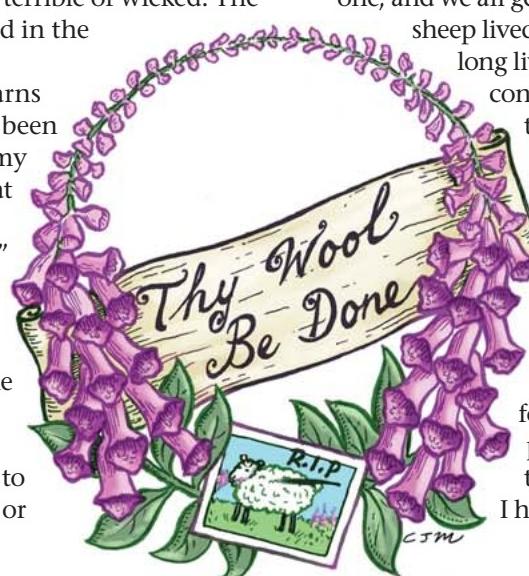
her earlobes from the gable of my house. I then put out a bucket of electric cattle prods and invite passers-by to have a little fun with a clear conscience. I have no doubt readers will have found other, more elegant solutions.)

Anyway, that fell morning I heard a noise that I had never heard before and that I do not wish to hear again. Out from my study I rushed and up to the paddocks I looked, and there I beheld one sheep on its side and the other on its feet. The sheep on its side was dying. The sheep on its feet was telling me. It was staring straight at me and making a noise that was repeated, unearthly and distressed. I wasn't sure quite what to do. Then the sheep on its side died. And the sheep on its feet fell silent and went back up the paddock. Within a month it too was dead.

The sheep were twins. I ascribed the first death to old age, the second to grief, which I for one find touching. But I refute any suggestion that – behold, Mount Ararat – the foxglove was to blame.

It is true that both paddocks abound in foxgloves. It is also true that the foxglove is toxic to stock and causes nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, xanthopsia, the appearance of blurred outlines (halos), drooling, abnormal heart rate, cardiac arrhythmias, weakness, collapse, dilated pupils, tremors, seizures, the tendency to copy lists off Wikipedia and even death. But, and this is a huge but, neither sheep ever suffered from any of these complaints except the last one, and we all get that from time to time. Moreover, those sheep lived among foxgloves for the whole of their long lives without ill effects and the goats continued to do so after the sheep had gone to meet the shepherd in the sky.

So I refute the vicious rumours put about by I don't know whom, and I hope that by including this story within the compendious and authoritative *A to Y of Gardening* (for which a few binders in imitation leatherette remain available) that the spirits of my sheep will be allowed the peace they deserve and the foxglove can continue to flourish at my place, its reputation unbesmirched. And if those things come to pass, I shall feel that I have done a small but good thing. 



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